

“Even Better than the Real Thing”? Historical Significance of Tribute Band Performances

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Biographical Sketch:

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Abstract:

This study argues for re-evaluating tribute band performances through the lens of historical significance rather than relying upon iconic authenticity to judge the success of these important contributors. Analyzing critics', fans', and tribute band members' evaluations, the author illustrates the limits of using authenticity as the primary lens for considering the impact of tribute bands on the history of heritage rock.

Key Words:

Iconic Authenticity; tribute bands; historical significance; heritage rock; popular culture history

1.Introduction

Studying trends in popular music listening habits can illustrate more than just music preferences. Examining how people engage with popular music can highlight the ways that people create and sustain cultural memory. In this article, I argue that tribute bands' performances of classic and popular rock music go beyond simply copying the original band. Instead, tribute bands act much like living history museums, curating historical memory in the present moment. By studying tribute bands, we can challenge the limiting critiques of

tribute bands and show how their performances introduce fans not only to the music but also to the historical contexts that give the music meaning.

Heritage rock is big business. As Bennett (2008) defines it, heritage rock “enshrines particular rock musicians of the late 1960s and early 70s not merely as sub- or counter-cultural icons, but as key contributors in the essential character of the late twentieth century culture per se and an integral aspect of the way in which this era of history is to be remembered, represented, and celebrated” (Bennett, 2008, p. 266). In a time when one can digitally download and immediately listen to almost any song, musician, album, and even live performance, a nostalgia for the “classic era of rock” permeates music culture in many ways, including reunion tours and re-issues of classical albums. Certainly, museums like the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland, Ohio and the Museum of Pop Culture in Seattle, Washington cater to this interest in revisiting music’s past. Both offer an interesting array of artifacts and iconic ephemera. Both work to combine sound and vision to represent the historical and cultural significance of popular music. Using innovative methods, these museums invite visitors to interactively experience the exhibits. But as innovative as the Garage at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame or the Sky Church at the Museum of Pop Culture are, they cannot capture the embodied experience of attending a live concert. In this regard, museums are ultimately limited by their very museum-ness. In fact, Reynolds (2011) claims that museums and popular music are antithetical:

Pop and the museum just don’t go together. Actually, I’m not sure music of any kind really works in a museum, a place of hush and decorum. Museums are primarily visual, oriented around display, designed for the contemplative gaze. The crucial element of sound has either to be absent or suppressed. Unlike paintings or sculptures, you can’t have sonic exhibits side

by side; they interfere with each other. So music museums contain the ancillary stuff (instruments and stage costumes, posters and packaging) but not the main thing. Ephemera, not what's essential. (p. 23)

Even if we do not agree that the two are antithetical, we can certainly appreciate the challenges museums face in finding ways to consistently provide embodied experiences with rock and roll music, especially live performances.

Creating experiences with live music—that is precisely where tribute bands excel. As performers who emulate a single band or musician, typically in terms of sound, look, and “feel,” tribute bands provide audiences with the ability to experience a Led Zeppelin concert forty years after they disbanded or to participate in a recreation of famous live events like the Beatles 1969 rooftop concert. As Bennett (2006) argues, “in the course of tribute band performances, dead rock stars are brought back to life, defunct bands are reassembled, and classic live performances of yesteryear are accurately reproduced again and again” (p. 23). A nostalgic desire to be returned to either a real or imagined past is a driving force behind the proliferation and success of tribute bands in the U.S. and worldwide. In particular, yearning for historical live performances is a significant contributing factor to tribute bands’ successes, as Inglis (2006) argues:

At a time when nostalgia and fantasy have become central components of the culture industry (Ritzer 1999; Bryman 2004), the ability to re-enter the past and engage some of its leading figures and events demands the existence of some relatively accessible guides to what is often difficult terrain. Tribute bands provide such a guide, and enable us to, temporarily at least ‘try to freeze some knife-edge moment’ (Mills: 1959, 168) in order to know it better. In this sense, the primary goal of the

tribute band is not dissimilar from the primary goal of the historian—to offer an account of the past. (p. 131)

These knowledgeable guides to heritage rock, specifically, and popular music, more generally, create an embodied experience for audiences. As one fan writes, “when you attend a really great tribute show, particularly when it is for an artist that is no longer performing or even alive, it gives you a chance to be part of an era past. Sometimes, the experience at its least is like attending a really fun interactive musical production, and at its best is like stepping through a portal into the past” (Tate, 2020, par 10).

Despite their success and popularity, tribute bands have been negatively critiqued by the music industry and are largely absent from official music histories (Bennett, 2006; Gregory, 2012). As Gregory (2012) argues, “tributes may enjoy lengthy careers performing the repertoire of the icons of rock and pop but, regardless of their popularity or the relative longevity of their respective careers, these signifiers of success have failed to guarantee them a place within the various histories of popular music” (p. 1). Academic critics have asserted that tribute bands are a postmodern copies of a copy, demonstrating no originality or authenticity (Bennett, 2008; Homan, 2006). Popular press critics like *Washington Post* author Barrell (2014) are less reserved in their critiques:

What is happening to the entertainment business? What became of the days when stars were real, and fans would only settle for the genuine article? Actually, it’s a wonder that it didn’t happen earlier. We are well into an age of mass production and fakery; of bootleg Rolex watches, pirate videos, cloned sheep and neo-Georgian houses with mock-Provencal kitchens. Why should we be alarmed at a few bogus, factory-made Freddie Mercurys? (par 6)

Barrell (2014) clearly positions tribute bands as “fakery” and devalues the role they play in the entertainment business. At the heart of such critiques is a reliance on a constructed concept of the original band that gets deemed “authentic” and against which tribute bands are judged to be “inauthentic.”

Because the main goal of tribute bands is “creating as perfect as possible a representation of the tribute act” (Bennett, 2006, p. 20), it is not surprising that critics, fans, and tribute band members frequently use the concept of authenticity to evaluate the success of tribute bands. New museum theorists (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Jones, 2010; King, 2006; Marstine, 2005) have highlighted, however, that the concept of authenticity is a complicated one. As Jones (2010) emphasizes, “authenticity is not simply a facet of the internal essence of discrete isolated entities as modernist discourse would have us believe, but rather a product of the relationships between people and things” (p. 200). Even so, the concept of “authenticity” circulates widely in discussions of tribute bands’ contributions (or lack thereof) to the entertainment business and to the history of heritage rock and other popular music.

Despite the fact that tribute band performances are “events presented by musicians and received by audience members deeply concerned with history” (Meyers, 2015, p. 76), their historical contributions are too often overlooked and devalued when authenticity is the primary lens used for evaluating their contributions. In this article, I contend that in order to fully understand tribute bands’ impact on and value to heritage rock history and popular music histories, we need to move beyond using authenticity as the primary (sometimes only) evaluative lens and ask, instead, what understandings of history tribute bands are enacting through their repeated and ubiquitous performances. Seen through the lens of living history

museums and performance as curatorship, tribute bands' contributions to the history of popular music can be more fully appreciated.

2. Authenticity:

Authenticity as a concept plays an important part in our current cultural moment, despite some postmodernists' arguments that the term is no longer relevant (Baudrillard, 1994). In fact, more and more people are searching for an "authentic" experience in an age where things seem increasingly unpredictable and temporary (Garma et al, 2014). In such a climate, experiences and artifacts perceived to be "authentic" are granted more value. Pointing out the importance of not generalizing the definition of authenticity, theorists (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Jones, 2012; King, 2006) argue that what counts as authenticity is a contested terrain. Those who are given cultural authority to evaluate something's authenticity are, thus, in a position of power to shape cultural perceptions of the reality of that experience or object. Museums have traditionally been seen as institutions central to the process of authentication in our culture. Because of this important role that authentication plays in museums, scholars who study museums provide helpful insights into the significance of and particularity of cultural uses of the concept of authenticity. Moore (2002) argues that "authenticity is a matter of interpretation which is made and fought for from within a cultural and, thus, historicized position. It is ascribed, not inscribed" (p. 210). From this view, "authenticity is not inherent in the object. Rather, it is a quality that is culturally constructed and varies according to who is observing the object and in what context" (Jones, 2010, p. 182). As such, debates about and claims of authenticity provide insight into what traits are being valued by a particular group or person at a particular cultural moment. This privileging comes out of and has impacts on our understanding of the artifact or event itself. As King

(2006) argues “appeals to authenticity often mirror a larger cultural struggle between powerful institutionalized voices and marginalized communities over the issues of representation and identity” (p. 235). Claims about authenticity, then, can be used to determine whose version of reality is widely accepted as valid. Given authenticity’s ability to determine whose experiences are valued or marginalized, it is important to study whose definition of authenticity is circulating in cultural understandings of history (King, 2006). Thus, it is important to study the ways that authenticity gets taken up and used in culture and to consider the implications of that use (Jones, 2010).

There are multiple definitions of authenticity, but Titon’s (2012) is important to pay attention to because it captures two common ways authenticity has been historically used. In the first widely used meaning, The authentic is the original, not the copy. Sometimes the copy carries a negative value: false, rather than true. One speaks of the authentic painting as opposed to the forgery; the authentic currency as opposed to the counterfeit; the real, as opposed to the imitation tricked out to look like the real thing. (Titon, 2012, p. 228)

What is privileged in this definition is a thing or experience that is perceived as “the real.” Drawing on Perice’s (1998) linguistic categories, Grayson and Martinec (2004) call this first meaning of authenticity *indexical*:

To view something as an index, the perceiver must believe that it actually has the factual and spatio-temporal link that is claimed. For example, to judge whether a chair is an indexically authentic Victorian chair, a consumer must have some verification (e.g., via certification or a trustworthy context) that it was indeed made during the Victorian era. And to determine whether a cultural dance performance is indexically authentic, a consumer must have some confidence (e.g., via additional information about the performers or cues offered during the

performance) that the dancers are being true to their selves and/or cultural identity and not simply going through motions that are unrelated to their personality or heritage. (p. 298)

Evaluations that embrace and use indexical authenticity are based on a belief in a singular, fixed original. In this framework, the original is always privileged over the copy.

Titon's (2012) second common meaning that has been historically given to the concept of authenticity takes a more favorable look at the idea of a copy and its relationship to the original. Titon (2012) explains that

At other times, the copy does not carry negative value: the historically informed performance of a piece of music, for example, is said to be true to the original composer's or score's intent. Or the copy proclaims itself as such, as when in a furniture store one may come upon 'authentic reproductions' of period pieces. (p. 228)

This meaning points back to the original but in different ways than the first meaning. The authority comes from faithfully capturing the "feel" of the original not in order to assert itself as the original but to validate it. This meaning of authenticity is closely related to the second of Grayson and Martinec's (2004) classifications which they call iconic authenticity:

To view something as an icon, perceivers must have some pre-existing knowledge or expectation which creates a 'composite photograph' (CP 2.435) in their minds. The perceivers compare this composite photograph with what they sense and make an assessment of similarity. For instance, to judge whether a reproduction of a Victorian chair is iconically authentic, a consumer must have some idea, however sketchy or detailed, of how Victorian chairs tend to look and feel. And to assess whether a cultural dance performance is iconically authentic, a consumer must have some sense—again, however sketchy or detailed—of how dances from this culture tend to look and sound. (p. 298)

The assessment of similarity is based on the copy acknowledging its positioning as a copy in an effort to extend the experience of the original for those who may not be able to it. Thus, someone who cannot own Victorian furniture can still have access to it through a faithful copy. Through this frame, copies are given more value.

2. Iconic Authenticity in Evaluations of Tribute Bands

While some music industry critics tend to use an indexical authenticity to frame their stringent critiques of tribute bands (Gregory, 2012), critics, fans, and the band members frequently draw on iconic authenticity when assessing the success of tribute band performances.

2.1 Critics' Use of Iconic Authenticity

In his article on Led Zepagain (a Led Zeppelin tribute band), critic Biedzynski (2017) uses the lens iconic authenticity to evaluate the band, emphasizing the ways in which the copy successfully captures the essence of the original. In its presentation of itself, Led Zepagain does not claim to be the original or claim indexical authenticity; instead, they position their chief goal as recreating the original. Acknowledging the band's intent, Biedzynski (2017) evaluates each of the four band members by comparing them to the originals they are emulating. His review of Swan Montgomery, the band's Robert Plant, is representative of his conclusions about the entire band:

Swan, who has mastered one of the more difficult and recognizable voices in rock history, has left no detail to chance and fans as well as other artists have clearly noticed . . . from authentic clothes, to mannerism, to phraseology, and even to imitating where Plant would stand on stage, Montgomery is convincing as the original Honeydripper. (para 5)

This perception of the performer's authenticity along with similar perceptions of the three other band members leads Biedzynski (2017) to determine that Led Zepagain, one of the longest running and most highly regarded of the U.S. tribute bands, deserves music industry and historians respect for keeping the music of Led Zeppelin alive. From his vocals to his physical placement on stage, Montgomery aligns with Biedzynski's (2017) composite photograph of what Led Zeppelin would have been like, based on knowledge of the original gained through videos: "for fans of Led Zeppelin like myself who never had the opportunity to see the band live, Led Zepagain—along with a dose of imagination—allows one to get a glimpse of what the real deal must have been like" (par 14).

Biedzynski (2017) is not alone in measuring the success of a tribute band performance through the lens of iconic authenticity. Other critics--some who are positive and some who are negative about tribute bands--rely on a similar lens. In his favorable review of No Quarter, another Led Zeppelin tribute band, Fox (2012) writes:

Bryan Christiansen was incredible as guitar god Jimmy Page. Not only was his playing spot on, most importantly, but his hand thrusts, head bobs, outfits, and stage presence was extremely Page-esque. He even coaxed some wild effects from a theremin during "No Quarter" and "Whole Lotta Love." (par 13)Here, Fox (2012) praises Christiansen not because he succeeds in *being* the original but because he succeeds in *being similar* to the original. Further, although he does not share other critics' positive view of tribute bands, Russell (2019) relies on iconic authenticity in order to make his evaluation: Plant, in his prime, was a sexy dude, and not just physically. His voice was sexy. While Sinclair embraced the world-famous rockstar demeanor, he could not replicate Plant's vocals in that department. Which very well might not be one of Sinclair's priorities, but the absence of

sexiness led to a one-dimensional vocal that was particularly noticeable on the woah's and ooh's of "Kashmir." (par 12)

Although Russell (2019) acknowledges that sounding as much like the original as possible might not have been Sinclair's goal, he suggests that it should have been, thus privileging an iconic authenticity. His critique of Sinclair is based on the fact that he did not achieve the verisimilitude that is typically associated with tribute bands. Russell (2019) judges the performer not because he is trying to copy but because his copying does not match Russell's composite photograph of what someone acting like Robert Plant should be. Thus, he faults him not for copying but for not capturing the essence or feel of Robert Plant *through* his copying.

2.2 Fans' Use of Iconic Authenticity

Fans' evaluations of tribute bands highlight a similar privileging of iconic authenticity as a central way to measure a tribute band's success. An authentic sound, as defined by the individual's perception, is of primary importance to fans. For instance, when asked what makes a great tribute band, Dolan, a fan who is also a musician, replied

I would say trying to sound as much like the original artist as possible. If you can look like them organically, it's great. A lot throw on wigs and sometimes it's cheesy though. But there are a couple of bands, like DSB—they don't dress like the band at all and they are one of the biggest tribute bands and have a huge following. They sound like them and they have a great following. (Callwood, 2000, par 29)

Here, Dolan acknowledges that looking like the band is a bonus but for her it is not a requirement for a tribute band to be considered authentic. Other fans also emphasize the primacy of sounding similar. Fan comments such as "They WEREN'T The Eagles???"

Seriously??? I mean, honestly, if you were blind or had your eyes closed, you would not be able to tell!! The vocals and instrumentals were ABSOLUTELY AMAZING” (T. Rivers, personal communication, August 2, 2019) and “An amazing group of extremely talented individuals . . . close your eyes and you would think it’s 1975” (R. Rizzo, personal communication, February 23, 2019) emphasize the extent to which fans privilege the authenticity of sound.

Despite agreement that sound is important, fans have multiple ways of defining authentic sound. Some compare tribute bands’ performances to the studio album versions of songs: “Just close your eyes and listen to them play . . . you swear u were listening to vinyl . . . oh yea” (A. Cooper, personal communication, February 19, 2012). Even some who judge the bands negatively rely on this comparison to the studio albums: “I didn’t like the songs. They played nothing from first 2 albums. Also the songs went on and on like they were never going to end. I left early. They can play their instruments and the singer was good but the songs they play compared to the first could albums were just okay” (P. Cindaro, personal communication, February 23, 2019). His composite photograph of the band does not match the performance. Despite the fact that Led Zeppelin concerts quite often included long improvisations of songs, this fan bases his judgment of the live performance on his experience with the recorded albums. Other fans, however, draw on knowledge of the original bands’ live performances to evaluate the tribute band performances: “Very close to the real thing. Take it from someone who is a product of sixties/seventies. Awesome show and the attire the band wore was right on. Would definitely recommend them to anyone who is a true rock fan” (S. Beaver, personal communication, February 5, 2018).

In addition to the importance of an authentic sound, some fans also emphasize the importance of the band members looking and acting like the originals, just as critics did. In a review of the Ultimate Stones, a Rolling Stones tribute band, Motwani emphasizes multiple performative aspects that made the band authentic for him and thus matched his composite photograph: “The Stones were fab. Mick looked great and pranced around like Mick, Ronnie looked and played like Ronnie, Keith acted typically Keith and played just as well. Charlie looked like the real Charlie” (A. Motwani’s, personal communication, March 4, 2019). Likewise, in a review of Dark Desert Eagles, a Eagles tribute band, Miller (2019) writes “Badger dressed something like Frey in laidback California cowboy/poet gear, delighted in staying in character, introducing the songs and his bandmates as if they were in fact the authentic band” (par 4).

What is valued in evaluations like these is not only sounding like the original but consistently embodying the character they are emulating.

Even with the differences between various fan’s evaluations, judging a tribute band performance through the lens of perceived authenticity is common to audience’s reaction to the performance. The diversity of fans’ reactions to tribute bands are evidence of the claim that “all authenticity, in one form or another, is a constructed, rhetorical phenomenon—that is to say, from a constructivist perspective, absolute, genuine, ‘true’ authenticity does not exist” (King, 2006, pp. 237). Not all fans agreed on the criteria to use to evaluate the success of the band, but they agreed that an iconic authenticity should be the bands’ primary goals—exactly how that gets defined varies depending on the factors that make up the fans’ composite photograph of the original. What we see from fan reviews is that the concept of

authenticity, especially iconic authenticity, clearly circulates widely amongst tribute band audiences and guides their evaluations of the performances.

2.3: Tribute Band Members' Use of Iconic Authenticity

The band members themselves recognize that they are not the original members, so therefore they make no claim to indexical authenticity. But they do evaluate themselves along lines similar to fans—in terms of iconic authenticity. They want to be good copies of the original overall. As Wooten (personal communication, March 5, 2019), the John Paul Jones of Led Zepagain, describes their goals for their audiences, “we basically want them to walk away at the end of the night feeling like they have just seen Led Zeppelin” (interview). Thiesen (personal communication, June 11, 2019), L.A.vation’s (a U2 tribute band) Bono, echoes Wooten’s goal for audiences: “We offer a performance over just a show. Our gigs are more like capturing the feeling you get when you’re at a U2 concert. Not just the sound, the look, but also emulating that overall feeling you have when you see U2 live.” Clearly, the “copy” is not trying to *replace* the original but to provide access to an experience *similar* to the original. Wooten and Thiesen, along with many other tribute band members, strive for this iconic authenticity in which the audience’s composite photograph of the original bands matches the tribute bands’ performances.

Since audiences give primary importance to the sound of the band, tribute band members go to great lengths to emulate an original sound. To achieve this goal, tribute bands pay careful attention to the details, as Gregory (2012) points out:

According to Greg Blackman, guitarist in US Led Zeppelin tribute Winds of Thor, many factors are involved in achieving the correct musical accuracy: “Generally speaking, the band members need to be EXTREMELY detail oriented. There are tons of little nuances in

Zeppelin songs that make these songs sound the way they do. Often times they are things that are barely noticeable, like a ghost note on the drums or a grace note on the guitar. If those things are absent, the songs just won't sound right and the audience will know it's off but probably won't be able to pin-point why." (p. 91)

This attention to detail frequently leads members to buy replicas of the exact equipment used by the original in order to achieve the correct sound. Smith (personal communication, February 20, 2019), the drummer of Led Zepagain, explains his detailed re-construction of the Bonham's drum work: Personally, I do my best to replicate every element of John Bonham's playing, look and sound. I have all four kits that Bonham played throughout his time with Zeppelin. I have most of the outfits that we word. I do my best to tune the drums in the same style he had his, despite modern sound engineers' frustrations that there is no port in the kick drum or that the drums are tuned big and open (and as a result, more difficult to balance in the mix for sound guys not familiar with that style.

Here, Smith (personal communication, 2019) describes how sounding similar requires not just a particular kind of playing but also using the same equipment, despite the challenges that equipment may pose to modern sound engineers.

Further, Thiesen (personal communication, June 11, 2019) explains that his band members similarly use equipment that replicates that which the original band uses in order to achieve the sound, look, and feel they want to achieve:

We try and recreate the sound, look, and 'feel' as accurately and exact as possible. We use all the same musical equipment of the real band (i.e. VOX guitar amplifiers, same guitars, including Bono's Grestch Irish Falcon, drums, Aguilar bass amp, Adam Clayton custom signature bass guitars, etc.). Bart even uses the same brand of guitar pick Edge uses because

of its distinct sound of how it hits the strings. It starts from the simplest and smallest things to the most obvious. I use the exact designer sunglasses Bono wears for each tour and even use the same brand microphone that Bono's used since he started in U2.

Clearly tribute band members try to achieve authenticity of sound through paying attention to the details]which requires band members to carefully study the originals. The choices illustrate that tribute band members frequently rely on the concept of iconic authenticity in determining how to re-create the sound and feel of the original band. Smith (personal communication, February 20, 2019) even goes as far to put a decal upside down on one of his drum sets because that is how the original was. The ultimate goal of this careful attention to detail is to create an authentic experience that transports fans back to the experience of a live performance.

3. Problems with Iconic Authenticity as a Lens

While the concept of authenticity is certainly an understandable lens to use to evaluate tribute bands given that their goal is emulation, particular uses of it and an overreliance on it can have limiting effects. As Jones (2010) argues, we must pay attention to the implications of our uses of the concept of authenticity. In the case of tribute bands, the problem with using iconic authenticity as the primary lens to evaluate their performances is that all too often it gets used in ways that flatten music histories by presenting a singular truth that is seemingly ahistorical. For instance, when Biedzynski (2017) asserted that Led Zepagain is "the real deal" (par 14), to which version of Led Zeppelin is he referring? Even in its relatively short duration, Led Zeppelin's music and performance styles changed. So, which version should be used to measure the authenticity of the band? Biedzynski's (2017) comment rests on a belief in a singular, timeless Led Zeppelin, a belief that is an illusion. This positioning of

heritage rock performers as timeless is common however. It is based in and created, at least in part, through what Homan (2006) calls “Hits and Memories” radio stations, ones which came about concurrently with the 1996 Telecommunications’ Act that consolidated radio station ownership. This consolidation meant that fewer people controlled what music got air time and radio owners capitalized on the benefits of homogenizing playlists in order to “achieve wider national audiences and station identities” (Homan, 2006, p. 34). The result of such consolidation was the creation and reinforcement of a narrow “museum of rock/pop canon (‘the best there was/is’) that countenances no argument about the pantheon of great songwriters and songs” (Homan, 2006, p. 35). What happens frequently is that a limited range of music is regularly played on repeat. Because “Hits and Memories” programming prolifically “appeals to both personal (‘I remember this’) and national (‘Britain’s greatest band’) memories” (Homan, 2006, p. 35), it makes sense that critics’ and fans’ composite photographs of heritage bands and popular music are influenced by this sort of programming. The critics’ and fans’ reviews of tribute bands illustrate that a “Hits and Memories” framework is guiding their evaluations of the authenticity of the bands. In reviews of tribute bands, these expectations often get conveyed through the evaluation of the song selections of the tribute bands. For instance, when fans make comments such as “My only complaint is that there were too many Zeppelin hits that weren’t played” (P. Ris, personal communication, February 4, 2019) and “Song selection while mainstream needs a review . . . many of the best Stones songs were left out . . . only 2 selections performed were pre-1969” (R. Friedman, personal communication, April 4, 2019), we see fans expressing a desire for “the hits.” Thus, the authenticity of tribute band performances is being measured through the kind of songs they play while at the same time, the songs that audience members

want them to play is influenced by “Hits and Memories.” And since the tribute band need to make money, their song selection is directly influenced by their perceptions of what fans and venue owners want (Thiesen, personal communication, June 11, 2019). Tribute band members are well aware of these audience desires, and they make performance decisions accordingly. Thiesen (personal communication, June 11, 2019) explains:

We mostly stay with the ‘hits’ because if you wander too far off from them, you tend to lose people’s interest. The hardcore U2 fans, of course, want to hear rarities and B-sides, or especially hear songs that U2 hasn’t played live or doesn’t play any longer. Once in a while we will venture off the path of just playing the hits, especially if we know ahead of time that we will be playing to a concentrated number of hardcore U2 fans.

The audience members, thus, influence the version of the original band’s history that tributes perform. Smith (personal communication, February 20, 2019) presents a similar interpretation, emphasizing that his band focuses on what the fans like, not necessarily what band members want to play: We do try to make sure we always play Zeppelin’s most well-known songs, i.e. Stairway to Heaven, Kashmir, Rock and Roll, Black Dog, etc. . . . We’re fortunate to be emulating a band that, of the 80+ songs in their catalog, a good 30-40 of them are well known by most people. That gives us a lot of flexibility to take chances with the set list and still have the audience walk away happy. That being said, if we’re playing a concert in the park, or a casino, and we know we’re going to have a more casual audience, then we’ll try and keep it hits-heavy. We are doing our best to play for the crowd though, and not our own selfish desires (most of the time).

In this way, tribute bands *respond* to audience and venue requests certainly, but through their repeated performances of “Hits and Memories” playlists, they also *contribute* to perceptions

of what parts of a band's catalog to value, i.e. which songs are the "hits." When tribute bands perform a "Hits and Memories" playlist, then, they are sustaining and participating in a particular narrative about the originals.

3.1 History of Music Flattened

The impact of this use of authenticity to narrow the musical range of bands is clear. When tribute bands play "the hits," they are problematically flattening the history of the band being emulated. Evaluations like "Led Zepagain was surprisingly good, some songs a little too long with guitar solos, but still very good" (J. Miller, personal communication, February 24, 2019) bespeak the desire for the bands to play the hits are common amongst tribute bands audiences. Audience perceptions of the length of the songs played, of the prevalence of extended guitar solos, and about the band not playing enough of the hits is evidence that the "Hits and Memories" model has permeated cultural conceptions of the original bands' histories.

3.2.1 Decontextualization of History

What gets left out in this approach? First, original bands and their music get taken out of context or are framed through a limited context. On a basic level, the original bands' progression and phases often get elided by playing all of their music from different time frames in the same show, without acknowledging the shifts. For instance, this practice is evident when AC/DC tribute bands include both Bon Scott and Brian Johnson songs with the same singer performing both of them or when the Beatles are presented in a mono-dimensional way. Although there are bands like Rain (a Beatles tribute band) that highlights the original's transitions through wardrobe changes, most bands do not do this. Further, many tribute bands flatten the history of the originals when they do not acknowledge the contexts

and controversies *around* the original band's music. They do this by taking the original bands' music out of the context *in* which and *for* which it was written and performed, and the performances become about playing the hits that the audience can sing along to rather than about highlighting the historical significance of songs like U2's "Sunday Bloody Sunday" and the Rolling Stone's "Paint It Black." As Homan (2006) points out, "if there is remembrance, there is also forgetting: the more faithful tributes privilege the commercially successful songs and band periods, at the expense of the less well known material. The messy narratives of band break-ups, court disputes and bad albums are often erased" (p. 46). Thus, we see Fleetwood Mac happily playing together and in one show I even saw a David Lee Roth character share the stage with a Sammy Hagar character, despite real-life controversies between the two. The representations frequently fix music in particularly limiting ways in order to present a polished, fan-ready version of the original band. The originals' contributions to culture are stripped away by focusing on playing the hits. The political edge is stripped away in the pursuit of feel-good memories.

3.2.2 Silencing of Bands' Influences

More disturbingly, this reliance on a "Hits and Memories" representation of the original bands erases the ways in which other artists influenced and shaped those bands. In this way, music history is further flattened. For example, fans of Led Zeppelin tribute bands routinely raise critiques of long guitar solos, despite the fact that an integral part of Led Zeppelin concerts were extended improvisations of the album versions, often including the long guitar solos that some fans denigrated. These improvisations oftentimes paid homage to the band's roots in the blues music of black musicians in the U.S. What this means is that at the actual Led Zeppelin concerts that fans purportedly want to be transported back to, they weren't

“playing the hits,” if that means playing would be widely accepted and circulated on “Hits and Memories” sorts of radio stations. Instead, Led Zeppelin concerts incorporated many guitar solos and improvised versions of their songs. As Homan (2006), highlights, this practice is common amongst tribute bands: “their educational function, the ability to impart knowledge about canonical artists, only works up to a point: tributes rarely privilege the influences upon the original (e.g. the various black artists from the US who provided the template for the Beatles and the Rolling Stones)” (p. 44). So when fans insinuate that tribute bands are at fault for performing long guitar solos, they contradict calls for authenticity; instead, what calls like that accomplish is a “Hits and Memories” radio version of the original band, instead of a re-creation of an authentic concert experience. The calls for authenticity are thus creating a narrow version of “the past” upon which some audience members look nostalgically.

3.3 Musical Canon

“Hits and Memories” radio comes out of a canonical view of music history. Tribute bands are shaped by this canon. That is evident in critics’, band members’ and fans’ commentary on the success of performances. Tribute band fans and band members get caught in a seemingly closed loop where the bands play the hits because that is what audiences claim to want, but because the tribute bands only play the hits, fans do not learn about the complexity of the originals’ music and history. King (2006) argues that “the rhetorical dimension of authenticity and memory play a significant role in construction and dissemination of privileged cultural narratives to audiences” (p. 237). While King (2006) was referring to museums, this privileging applies to tribute bands, too, because through their repeated, ubiquitous performances, tribute bands make available particular stories of the original

band's history, identity, and significance over and over again. Through these performances, tribute bands are crafting a story and, as King (2006) points out, "institutionalized stories have the power . . . to control how people remember the past" (p. 240). And since tribute band performances "frequently become a primary referent for the audience" and their understanding of the originals (Bennett, 2006, p. 23). These stories impact not only evaluations of tribute bands' performances but also people's conceptions of the original bands' histories. Because of what gets left out when authenticity claims are used in this way, we need to challenge authenticity as the *primary* lens for evaluating the success of tribute band performances, looking instead at the historical importance of the groups to shape heritage rock and other popular music history.

4. Historical Significance of Tribute Bands

If iconic authenticity alone is an insufficient and problematic lens to use to evaluate the success of tribute bands, then what lens could we use in order to better understand tribute bands that allow bands to move beyond the "Hits and Memories" approach? What is missing from many uses of the concept of authenticity to evaluate tribute bands is historical context. I contend that tribute bands should be considered equivalent to living history museums because of their historical significance. Tribute bands' impact extends beyond the entertainment value they provide audiences. In fact, even though tribute bands are generally critiqued by the music industry (Gregory, 2012), in working to achieve iconic authenticity they have a significant role in determining and shaping cultural conceptions of the original bands' histories. Tribute band members curate a particular vision of the original through their selection of instruments, clothing, and play list, to name just a few of the performative decisions members make. Through their performances, tribute bands contribute to the

cultural production of the dominant view of the original bands' histories. Instead of merely copying the originals (and failing in terms of indexical authenticity), tribute bands, like museums, "have the power to remap cultural territories, and to reshape the geographies of knowledge" (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 22). Simply because they play ubiquitously (when the originals either no longer tour or do not tour nearly as regularly as tribute bands), tribute bands can have a large effect on the ways audiences perceive the original and the ways in which audiences interact with the originals and their histories. Combine this with the affective domain of a live music performance and the off-stage relationships that audiences build with band members and one can easily see how, tribute band members act much like museum curators in that they have power to "create, to make visible, and to legitimate meanings and values" (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 19) of the musicians they emulate. Thus, instead of merely copying a fixed history of heritage rock and popular music constructed by others, tribute bands contribute significantly to dominant perceptions of the original bands' music and histories. Constructing a tribute band performance is much like curating a museum exhibit; both are practices in which "questions of meaning are questions of power, which raise issues of the politics of representation. Who has the power to create, to make visible, and to legitimate meanings and values?" (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 19). Instead of being ephemeral or merely entertaining acts, then, tribute bands do much to shape perceptions of music histories. As Homan (2006) argues, "it is important to remember that tributes play their part in the ideological work that constructs the pop music canon" (p. 46), in more dynamic, embodied ways than museums do. Tribute bands thus have opportunities to contribute to re-writing of personal and public memories and histories of heritage rock and popular music. Once we start seeing tribute band members as similar to museum

curators, the responsibility and weight that their stage decisions have taken on new meaning. By changing the primary frame through which we evaluate tribute bands from authenticity, we will begin to evaluate their performances through their historical contributions, rather than their material success. Instead of asking how much they resemble the original, we can begin to ask what contributions they make to historical perceptions of heritage rock and popular music. In this way, tribute bands members are like curators as well as talented musicians. Through this lens, we can pay attention to the ways that performance decisions construct particular histories of the bands and perhaps tribute bands could even more widely embrace that role as curator and begin to more thoroughly weave historical lessons throughout their performances and on their social media sites. Through curating particular representations of cultural memory, tribute bands help to illustrate the importance of studying engagements with and through popular music. In order to continue to explore that significance, it is important for future researchers to study the varieties in tribute band performances and ascertain their impact on fans' cultural memories. Studying explicitly historical performances like L.A.vation's "A Story for Boys" in which they interweave the history of U2 throughout their musical performance can provide us with greater insights into the ways that popular music and history intersect and provide insights into how cultural memory is created and sustained in the present moment.

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