

Subject to Change:

Nine constructions of the crossover between
Western art and popular musics (1995-2005)

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Abstract

Exchange between musical cultures has always occurred, but in the age of the global music industry, marketing categories have multiplied and often created boundaries between musics. Today the term “crossover” is attached to many of the musical exchanges that occur across these boundaries. One such exchange is represented by the intersection between Western art music string instruments and popular musics. A well-known commercial niche, this particular crossover is often discussed in popular media, but has been examined by relatively few music scholars. By way of addressing this gap, this study considers the crossover between Western art music string instruments and popular musics in the context of extra-musical promotion and critical reception. It examines four artists in the period 1995 to 2005. These four examples are: U.K./Australian string group bond; Australian string group FourPlay; U.K. violinist Nigel Kennedy; and U.K. violinist Vanessa-Mae. It also draws on other relevant cases to illuminate the discussion.

The primary aim of the study is to discover and analyse the complex ways that parties engage, consciously or unconsciously, with the term “crossover”. The inherent complexity of the term is not commonly captured by scholarly musical writing since crossover is often regarded simply as a marketing term. The study begins by establishing the scholarly and popular context of the crossover between the Western art music string tradition and popular forms. Nine constructions or layers of meaning evoked by the term “crossover” are then identified. In the context of each of these nine constructions, the work continues by exploring how the term “crossover” is used in the promotion and critical reception of the examples. It is argued that crossover is constructed as a marketing category, to mark individuality, to provide media shortcuts and signposts, to evoke associations of prestige and of credibility, to increase accessibility, to encourage confrontation and to take part in larger musical debates. This research thus identifies multiple layers of meaning evoked by the term that are “subject to change” and that, in turn, illuminate deeper social and cultural implications of “crossing-over”, ones which no doubt themselves continue to change.

Declaration

This thesis is the original work of Aliese Millington.

It contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available in all forms of media, now or hereafter known.

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