

- ARTICLE -

Why Cover?: An Ethnographic Exploration of Identity Politics surrounding ‘Covers’ and ‘Originals’ Music in Dunedin, New Zealand

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Abstract

This article explores the identity of musicians located in Dunedin, New Zealand (NZ) who are both ‘covers’ musicians as well as members of the indie rock-oriented ‘originals’ community. It specifically reviews the tensions concerning musicians’ identity in relation to their practice of performing covers, which carries preconceptions – from the public and other musicians – concerning a lack of artistic integrity. Drawing on participant-observation ethnographic research, this article critically reviews extant literature on cover music, which tends to emphasise the ‘song’ over the practice of covering. Although there have been important scholarly contributions to covers as a vocation, such as Morrow (2006) and Mitchell (2006), the literature rarely focuses on or deeply examines the identity of cover-practitioners when they occupy roles as both originals and covers musicians. My analysis is also informed by literature on Dunedin music-making that focuses on the historically significant ‘Dunedin Sound’ originals scene. I argue that through covering Dunedin musicians contradict and oppose dominant identity formations that have been previously emphasised in both the literature and mediated representations of the indie rock scene in Dunedin and thus subvert traditional positionings of themselves by formulating and expressing a complex identity. The participants I interviewed for this research clearly identify that their covering supports their originals pursuits in multifarious ways, while also pointing to a stigma associated with covering that affects their originals music-making and identity. The participants reinforce these complex identifications by emphasising their desire to perform originals as well as covers despite this both pervasive and reflexive stigmatisation of their vocation, and in doing so, to highlight the key concepts that underpin the identity politics among musicians in this context.

This article investigates notions of identity among members of the Dunedin ‘originals community’ with regards to the practice of conducting performances of cover songs, known as cover gigs. I have been a contributor to the Dunedin music scene as both a covers and originals musician for eight years, which has afforded me a modicum of understanding and involvement in relation to the Dunedin music community and

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industry. In this article I wish to examine the indie roots of Dunedin music via its historically significant Dunedin Sound movement. I also wish to point to the vocation of professional 'covering' as an important modality of performance and economic support for original musicians in the city. By examining the creative aspects of covering and the monetary investment in originals that covering allows for musicians, as well as arguing for an understanding that positions the covers band as a distinct phenomenon divorced from the tribute band, I propose that professional covering drives the musicianship of many Dunedin original artists both economically and creatively.

Dunedin is a small city in the South Island of New Zealand (NZ), with a large student population associated with the University of Otago and the Otago Polytechnic. Due in part to its student-based nightlife, the city offers a considerable number of performance opportunities for covers musicians. The covers music industry in Dunedin is concentrated around an area known colloquially as 'The Octagon'. This area contains several bars, and could be described as the centre of nightlife-based socialising in Dunedin. This article will focus on musicians that perform mainly in The Octagon, as the frequency of covers performances is high in this area. The type of musicians these venues hire are generally soloists, and small bands of three to four musicians. Full bands often utilise a conventional rock band setup comprising of vocals, electric guitar, bass, and drums. This practice is relatively lucrative for covers musicians (many of whom are also students), in that some earn upwards of NZ\$100 an hour. Musicians generally play for no more than three hours across an evening of performance. Dunedin also has a vibrant originals scene centred around independent venues such as Chick's Hotel, Sammy's Entertainment Venue, Robbie Burns Pub, Dog With Two Tails and Inch Bar, and the Otago University Student Association (OUSA), which is supported by the University's music venue Re:Fuel. These venues accommodate many genres, including metal, hip-hop and reggae; however, it is the bands that generally utilise and articulate rock and indie-rock conventions that I wish to focus on in this article. Indie, as Rogers (2010) has argued, often expresses itself as an ethos in opposition to dominant hegemonic cultural forces. Rogers (2010, 640) claims that indie 'has seldom situated listeners and musicians within the commercial sphere of the music industry. Opposition and fluidity reside at the core of the genre's aesthetic'. The Dunedin indie scene has a link to a similarly oppositional and independent ethos via a history of indie rock bands that have come to be collectively known as the Dunedin Sound. This scene originated in the 1980s, and has been covered in both scholarly and mainstream media as something akin to a 'punk' or 'DIY' scene. Holland and Wilson argue that the 'Dunedin Sound' is defined by 'Dunedin artists' subversion of dominant commercial music industry and recording practices . . . grounded in a specific time and ideological space' (2015, para.9).

The historical significance of this Dunedin Sound phenomenon and its effect on original music-making in Dunedin contribute to an atmosphere of stigmatisation for covers practitioners, and the complex formation of identity that results when musicians perform both originals and covers music in separate and dichotomised

contexts and venues. Dunedin rock and indie musicians do, however, regularly supplement their original music endeavours via the practice of ‘covering’. This practice reveals important modalities of performance, function and self-identification for musicians within the scene that have hitherto not been explored in existing literature. I identify significant negative connotations that are associated with the practice of covering in the Dunedin indie-scene, despite its seeming ubiquity in the practices of indie musicians, including myself. Despite the efficacious influence that covering exerts over the creative endeavours of Dunedin musicians, the practice of covering is still seen by some groups—and indeed self-identified by some participants—as a stigma of sorts that is antithetical to indie formations of identity. This struggle within, and between, supposedly ‘fixed’ formations on which local musicians identities are based is an intriguing ideological tension that continues in the present music scene. The central conceptual framework of this article concerns music’s capacity to reflect and embody notions of cultural identity. Many scholars have noted that music is a central element in the formation of identity. My conceptual framework draws on the work of Martin Stokes (1994, 4), who argues against a structuralist understanding of music as a reflection of identity, and instead points to the capacity for ‘music and dance’ to ‘provide the means by which the hierarchies of place are negotiated and transformed’. Stokes elaborates that ‘music is socially meaningful not entirely but largely because it provides means by which people recognise identities and places’ (1994, 5).

In addition to my own perspectives, this article draws on interviews with six Dunedin musicians who were selected because they engage in the practice of making and performing their own music, while performing the music of other artists as an economic venture. My ethnography took the form of participant-led, informal interviews in which participants addressed a series of questions and sought to explain their perspective on the act of covering and its relation to their own original music. I also sought to identify how they viewed themselves as musicians and people within the wider Dunedin music social group. The participants are all males ranging from the age of 20 to 27. They will be identified throughout the course of the article as per Madison’s (2005, 36) use of coded ‘clumps’ of ethnographic data via Glesne (1999). It is important to note at the outset, however, that there are no female musicians in this selection of participants, even though there are many notable and active female musicians in the Dunedin music scene. This represents a significant limitation in the research, which further research would be required to explore.

My research position within the discussion is also integral to the ethnographic perspectives provided. I consider myself an insider within this context. I am a musician that performs both covers and original music, and consider myself a member of the ‘originals’ Dunedin music scene. I perform drums or bass in the original bands *Julian Temple Band*, *Two Cartoons*, and *Males*,¹ as well as sing and play drums and guitar in covers act *Daniel Shea* and my own solo covers act. I have also performed with some of the participants on various occasions, and know all of them on a personal level, and

regard friendship among musicians as integral to the fabric of the local music community. Similar to Holland and Wilson, I recognise that 'ethnographic methods [are] logistically and epistemologically crucial in recording and production research' (2015, para.6). This article therefore seeks to present new perspectives, in the form of my interpretations, on the ways that musicians function in a contemporary context as both covers and original artists.

Covers Musicians: Artists and Covering Practices

Practitioners of covers in Dunedin generally perform professionally in a narrow range of venues located within the city centre. Venues that employ musicians in a covering capacity include, but are not limited to, Ratbags, The Craic, Stuart Street Mac's Brew Bar, The Terrace, Craft Bar, and Ra Café and Bar. Several bars outside of The Octagon also hire covers musicians, such as Ombrellos, The Bog Irish Tavern, and The Robbie Burns Pub. Venues outside of The Octagon other than The Bog Irish Tavern tend to hire musicians under verbal agreements based on casual contracts. Bars within The Octagon tend to hire musicians to perform on specific nights, and despite the casual contractual basis of their arrangement, do tend to foster long-standing relationships (i.e. for several years) with those cover musicians. The pay rate for musicians who perform covers varies from venue to venue; however, a band will be paid anywhere from \$300 to \$600 depending on the night on which they perform. Bars in The Octagon frequently employ solo performers. Solo performers generally charge \$100 dollars an hour (gross). A set period of time is often agreed to by covers bands and solo performers with the venue-owner; covers practitioners often play for three hours, while taking an average of three breaks of 10 to 15 minutes between each hour. Covers musicians perform a variety of music from pop to hip-hop. However, there is a particular canon of rock cover songs which is frequently utilised by musicians in this context. Participants that I interviewed referred to these songs as 'classics', which I will return to later in this section.

A predominant mode of conceptualising covers frames it as a 'versioning practice' and defines covers as 'mimic covers' (see Solis 2010, 298; Magnus, Magnus and Uidhir 2013). The former concept defines 'covering' as a distinct *practice*, divorcing the definition in some ways from the necessity that has been emphasized in scholarship for *recording* to be an integral part of the covering taxonomy, and from the necessity that the artists covering the material embody the cultural signifiers of another artist *within* their performance – such as Gregory (2012) argues in relation to 'Tribute Bands'.² The concept of the 'mimic covers' is useful in this context, as they need not be recorded in order to constitute 'covering' as a versioning practice (Magnus, Magnus and Uidhir 2013; Solis 2010). Mimic covers are performed by musicians that in many ways do not seek to appropriate the exact structural or sonic elements of the original, but rather feature the song as a canonical foundation for cover musicians' musical interpretations and artistry. In this sense, the notion of mimic covers may be a useful way of understanding the interpretative covers of Dunedin rock bands and others. Dunedin

cover practices, however, also tend to emphasise extemporaneous arrangement, extensive improvisation, and a stripped-down sonic aesthetic. This approach suggests that traditional literature which focuses on covers as ‘song’, and even the concept of the ‘mimic cover’, while useful, have limitations. Indeed, historically the phrase ‘cover song’ emerged in the 1960s as a nomenclature for songs that had been previously recorded, and were performed or recorded by another artist or performer (Magnus, Magnus and Uidhir 2013):

Roughly, the distinction is this: An original is a recording or performance of a song either by the person who wrote it or by the person for whom it was written. A cover is a later recording or performance by someone else. (2013, 361)

The article takes this basic definition as a starting point for both the definition of originals and of covers, while recognising the limitations discussed above.³ I would claim, however, that Dunedin covering, as will be discussed, subverts the definition of covering provided here and above, in that it emphasises that covers are *not* mimicked, but rather *interpreted* and expanded through innovative arrangements, improvisation, and genre reinterpretation, and thus intersect with creative processes often equated with ‘originals’ music.

The above definitions of a ‘cover’ tend to focus on what is and what is not a cover, rather than the effects of the *practice* of covering. The above also points to the tendency of scholars not to focus on the musical acts that perform covers—with the exception of ‘Tribute Bands’ as outlined by Gregory (2012). Magnus, Magnus and Uidhir (2013), Cusic (2005), Gregory (2012), Brown (2014) and even Solis (2010) devote most of their time to defining the boundaries of what we are allowed to name a ‘cover’. As outlined above in relation to Dunedin covering, the cover *band* as a professional venture can be described as a collection of musicians that perform multiple sets of covers in a venue, generally for monetary payment. They perform for a pre-arranged period of time in a professional capacity, and generally do not perform their original songs. Instead they perform songs from a kind of ‘classics’ ‘covers canon’. ‘Classics’ can be described as songs from the late 1960s to the late 1980s in the rock genre that often share similarities with country and western music. Matthew Collins of The Collins Brothers Band—a covers band from Dunedin—described some examples of ‘classics’: ‘So, *April Sun in Cuba*, *Brown Eyed Girl*, oh what’s another one, any Dragon song or Creedence Clearwater Revival song’ (Personal Communication 19 March 2015). When I asked Tom Maxwell of Dunedin originals band The Killergrams to name some songs in the rock canon of covers, he stated, ‘*Wonderwall*, ah, *Sweet Home Alabama*, you know, the classics’ (Personal Communication 19 March 2015). The repertoire of covers bands in Dunedin often utilises this canon of classic rock and country music. Significantly, covers musicians also rearrange, change, and modify originals songs from other artists for this purpose, unlike tribute acts, where simulacra are a core aspect of the performance and ethos. My analysis below shows that covers musicians have a

much more oppositional formation of identity—which is formed in relation to the practice of covering—and often emphasise their own creative/originals identity as *directly opposing and critical* of the performance of covers. In this way, I argue for a definition of covers artists which takes into account the possibility of complex identity formations.

On this note, Roy Shuker (2003, 207) observes that cover bands are seen as being uncreative imitators, who generate no artistic musical outcomes for those involved in the practice. However, this definition does not address the multifarious ways that practitioners use covers performances (and the preparation that they entail) to advance their understanding of song structures, increase their improvisational skills, and accrue capital specifically to fund their expensive originals endeavours, which require substantial economic investment. Dunedin covers artists also have a comprehensive relationship with an original ethos, and note that covering contributes to the advancement of their musical artistry. The following section outlines the historical significance of the Dunedin Sound for originals musicians in the city of Dunedin, while discussing the scene and ethos that these musicians are influenced by.

Dunedin Sound: Issues of Scene, Identity, and Musical Duality

The small city of Dunedin constitutes a historically significant centre for musical innovation, most recognisably in the form of the Dunedin Sound movement of the 1980s. The 'Dunedin Sound' is a mediatised term that constitutes an interrelated system of ideas and cultural cues which signify an independent, isolated, original, and uniform ethic of resistance and simultaneous re-appropriation of mainstream conventions of the time within originals music-making. The movement was successful at attracting coverage on an internationally mediated level. This collection of constructed ideas about the meaning of Dunedin music-making in that period was extreme influential for its representation to national and international audiences, and thus has significant ramifications for any discussion of new Dunedin bands and artists.

Scholarship on the Dunedin Sound covers many aspects of the mediatisation and musicology of the movement. These topics include, but are not limited to, record production and 'technostaglia' (Holland and Wilson 2015), historical and musicological aspects of the movement (Bendrup and Downes 2011), record label dynamics and touring (Shuker and Pickering 1994), indie canonism (Bannister 2006a), a cultural geographical approach (McLeay 1994, Homan 2000), gender (Bannister 2006b), and the nature of indie (Mitchell 1994). The phrase 'Dunedin Sound' is the nomenclature that is used to describe both a period of musical output and an aesthetic approach that is linked geographically to the city of Dunedin. Bendrup and Downes' *Dunedin Soundings* is a collection of essays that claims that music is geographically and contextually influenced, much in line with similar assertions concerning music, place and identity (Connell and Gibson 2003, Frith 2007). Bendrup and Downes (2011, 11) also argue that the Dunedin Sound is a mediatised term that points to the

interpretation of particular groups in the early 1980s, notably The Clean, The Chills, Sneaky Feelings and The Verlaines. Graeme Downes was a founding member and songwriter for The Verlaines, and thus sets a precedent for participatory research into Dunedin bands and music (it is also worth noting that Holland and Wilson are involved with The Chills). The term 'Dunedin Sound', however, is also beginning to be used in the contemporary context to describe the aesthetically similar musical outputs from the Dunedin music scene, and thus is significant for our discussion of current music-making in the city (see Smithies 2014).

The history of the Dunedin Sound and its relation to local acts that perform in the modern context still attract national media attention (see Alexander 2015 and Schulz 2010). I emphasise the term 'scene' here, in line with Bendrups and Downes' assertion that there existed a communal and supportive atmosphere created by the musicians and the respective community at the time that propelled the entire movement forward artistically and, arguably, commercially (2011, 12). A similar scene of guitar-pop music is, at the time of writing, operating with a comparable air of communality and support. The Dunedin Sound phenomenon not only generates an 'imagined' effect of similarity between the current and historical scenes of Dunedin originals music-making, but is also a reification of similar scene-values that are re-constructed by contemporary musicians and mediated representations of them.⁴ These values emphasise a DIY ethos, impecuniousness, a pared-down arrangement of instruments that feature guitar as a main instrumental carrier of sonic qualities and structure for songwriting, and a notion of authenticity constructed around these aspects.

'Ethos' is an important notion among Dunedin musicians. Ethos can be understood best from Halloran's assertion that 'to have ethos is to manifest the virtues most valued by the culture to and for which one speaks' (1982, 62). Ethos, then, is the embodiment of the values of a particular culture, and in this instance, a series of punk, economic, and aesthetic qualities that are related to the Dunedin Sound are often reappropriated by contemporary artists in the Dunedin originals music scene as cultural necessities for indie musicians. Of course, not all of the aesthetic aspects of the Dunedin Sound are appropriated by originals bands in Dunedin, or are even well regarded by originals bands in other genres. However, the ethos of Dunedin originals *indie* and *rock* musicians – which the participants in this study often perform in relation to—is undoubtedly informed by DIY attitudes, guitar-based instrumentation, 'lo-fi' production and so on. Importantly, this ethos precludes performing covers of music that feature within the rock canon described by participants as 'classics'.⁵

Another aspect that ties current musicians to the Dunedin Sound ethos is the geographical location of Dunedin. Dunedin is a relatively isolated area of New Zealand, which is crucial to the mythos of the musical movement and the mediation of the Dunedin Sound (McLeay 1994; Homan 2000; Bendrups and Downes 2011). The identity and ethos of the Dunedin Sound movement and its impact on contemporary scene politics is founded, essentially, on 'place'. Hudson (2006, 627) defines 'places' as

'complex entities, ensembles of material objects, people, and systems of social relationships embodying distinct cultures and multiple meanings, identities, and practices'. In sum, covers musicians are often, by default, positioned in direct contrast to the ethos that is implied by the historically significant Dunedin Sound music scene, and the underlying ideological structure of the movement serves to inform a stigmatisation of Dunedin musicians who perform covers in the Dunedin music industry today.

Origins of Participants' Cover Music-Making in Dunedin

In my discussion with musicians in the study, I found a deep correlation between their covering of music, and their desire to play original music. However, musicians usually initiated their originals pursuits via the act of performing covers in public. This fact is not particularly surprising, considering most musicians perform a sort of 'musical apprenticeship' via the learning and performing of covers songs. What is of note here is that many musicians continue to perform covers long after their originals music projects are performing regularly, due to the money covers gigs provide. In other words, though musicians in this study identified their primary artistic desire as performing originals songs, some artists did not seek to discontinue their covers performing, and in most cases, supplemented their originals production costs with covers work. Morrow's (2006) discussion of the Sydney music scene and its career-path of 'dual' musicianship has shown that this vocational duality is not only lucrative but in many cases *necessary* for artists who wish to function in the music industry. The origins of the participants' understanding and negotiation of this duality is an important element of their later musical identification within the Dunedin music scene. For example, Reece Vaitupu is a vocalist and guitarist who performs with the busy reggae/rock originals group *Ragged*. Reece explains the origin of his own music-making:

Well, me and Dylan initially started busking . . . down the farmer's market, and then Angus . . . wanted to start a band, and he knew George, who was a bass player . . . I knew Angus from school, we both went to Kings, the same school . . . [the performances were] strictly covers. (Personal Communication 19 March 2015)

Reece now utilises covers performances to invest in his other creative endeavours, which are centred around his originals band *Ragged*. This reflects a 'duality' that Reece has internalised in order to function more effectively (and sustainably) in the Dunedin music scene. Importantly, however, Reece only talks about identity in relation to our later discussion of the stigma associated with covering, which serves to highlight both the use-value of covering for Dunedin musicians, and the participant's own complex understanding of what it *means* to cover music. Reece expressed similar reservations when it came to covering music that might have been reflected in the indie-ethos of the Dunedin Sound.

Samdrub Dawa, a drum tutor and drummer for originals band Thundercub, identified that his originals music-making also started with playing covers. Samdrub focussed intensely on covering music throughout his tertiary course at the Southern Institute of Technology, where prior to this he learned to play the drums through drum lessons, and later by performing covers with other Dunedin-based covers bands. However, Samdrub states that most of his music-making now is based in performing originals: 'Most of the time that I perform I am playing originals' (Personal Communication 19 March 2015). Tom Maxwell of The Killergrams, an original Dunedin blues/rock band, provides a different perspective, stating that his beginnings in relation to covering were always imbued with the idea that he would one day play originals music. Tom's covers band would insert originals into their early performances: 'we would chuck all of our originals in there—because it was always veering towards playing all of our originals, the whole time' (Personal Communication 19 March 2015).

Antonio Mercuri is a drummer for the originals band The River Jesters (featuring singer Tom Batchelor, whose local notoriety was boosted through a strong performance on the television show *X Factor New Zealand*). Antonio also has over six years of experience performing in covers bands with Dunedin musicians formed from members of Dunedin originals rock/reggae group Left or Right and originals indie-rock band Alizarin Lizard. Antonio presents a very positive and practical positioning of his covers music pursuits. He states that he began refining his drum performance in order to prepare for covers performances. Antonio suggests, in relation to another prominent Dunedin band, that they create music *specifically* in relation to covering songs:

They did [start as a covers band]. And they learned how to play together, they learned how to play songs. I've seen the songwriting and how they do it, they get on the buzz of an artist for a while, and umm, get influenced, just like the rest of us, just like everybody else does. (Personal Communication 19 March 2015)

This reveals that the process of originals music-making, for some artists in the Dunedin music scene, is directly linked to practicing their instruments and musical sensibilities through the covering of other musicians' work. It also reveals that music-making is in some ways underpinned by creating a musical simulacrum of another artist in the form of performing covers at dedicated covers shows, utilising this creative pivot as a starting point for originals music creation vis-à-vis their own musical sensibilities. Arguably, then, the performance of covers in a 'live' situation is also a reflection of a musician's originals identity, which directly conflicts with the definition of covers as 'mimic' covers, as argued by Magnus, Magnus and Uidhir (2013). If musicians construct their idea of their own originals identity based on music that they prefer *and* in some cases cover, then it is reasonable to assume that the motivations that govern their covering also influence the approach they employ when writing.

Beyond creative endeavours, participants argued that covers music performances constitute a significant material influence on their originals music pursuits, both at the outset of their careers and at the current time. Reece explains that covers gigs are for him funding devices that exist to further the goals that his band has in relation to their originals music: 'Now that we're doing more originals, we're not playing as Ragged. We do [covers] just to fund things. It all goes back to the [originals] band' (Personal Communication 19 March 2015). Other participants expressed a similar desire to further their originals music pursuits by funding them with cover performances. Tom explains that not only is covering his 'full time' employment, but also his way to fund originals music:

Well, it just funds—it means I play three days a week, it means I can pay my rent, it means I can eat, I means I can have a beer if I want to, or I can save money. And, I've got four days of the week to organise, rehearse, perform, whatever else . . . energy is needed to go in to my originals. (Personal Communication, 19 March 2015)

Tom Maxwell suggests further that '. . . the reason I'm doing this [covering] is to make money for *The Killergrams* . . . I have long-term goals that I want to achieve doing my own stuff' (Personal Communication, 19 March 2015). In this way Tom sees his covering activities as actively and directly funding and supporting his original pursuits; however, they are seen as notably different occupational spheres for Tom, despite his own identification of their creative, economic, and presentational overlap. All other participants expressed a similar relationship to covering, in that their cover performances provided the monetary return that they saw as a necessary element of furthering their originals music goals.

Desire to Play Originals Music

When asked to discuss originals, participants tended to emphasise their originals music as being creatively more valuable and important to them as people. However, this process of valorisation was complex, and pointed to contradictory and oppositional subject positions. Participants argued that they preferred performing originals music, yet concomitantly opposed *and affirmed* the dominant stigmatised representation of covering that was commonly identified in relation to the originals ethos in Dunedin. Participants were able to articulate an understanding of that stigma from a similar subject position as strictly originals musicians, and in most cases they empathise with the very stigma that they themselves oppose. For example, Reece Vaitupu, vocalist for originals and former covers band Ragged, argues he is 'happy' to play covers 'for a greater goal', that goal being to fund his originals performances and pursuits (Personal Communication 19 March 2015). Participants overwhelmingly identified with this perspective, wanting to advance their originals activities, and in some cases eventually *end* their covers labouring. An overwhelming proportion of participants stated that they would discontinue their covers endeavours if they were

given a hypothetical option where they could make the same amount of money from originals. This seems logical, given that participants value their originals endeavours more than their covers performances. An element of musical satisfaction plays into this decision; Antonio Mercuri suggests that originals music is more *satisfying* for a musician to play. As Antonio explains,

I mean, it's easy to please people by playing *Sweet Home Alabama*, and it's harder to please people by playing your own stuff. And umm, so yeah, if someone said to me, 'You can earn the same amount of money and [just] play your originals', I'd definitely play my originals, for lots of reasons—people will know your music more over time, you'll get better at being a band together. (Personal Communication, 19 March 2015)

However, Antonio's performance of covers is still represented by him as a meaningful and useful practice in relation to his musicianship: 'I thoroughly—I love the show, I love my job. It's great, and . . . you get paid to drink beer' (Personal Communication, 19 March 2015). Antonio continues, 'It's the best job really you can have. I would do it every night if I could. 'Cause—I like lots of money' (Personal Communication, 19 March 2015). Therefore, while originals music is more important to Antonio in the sense of musical satisfaction, covers performances were emphasised as motivated chiefly by economic benefit: 'Sometimes you do feel like—you're in the middle of *Mustang Sally* [and] you're like: "God I am getting nothing from this"' (Personal Communication 19 March 2015).

Figure 1 below displays the percentages that interviewees identified in relation to three categories of motivation for covers endeavours, in order to demonstrate the motivations behind covering music in terms of monetary gain and musical satisfaction. These three categories were: (1) monetary gain; (2) practice and musical improvement; (3) enjoyment of the performance itself. Note that Samdrub Dawa and Matthew Collins were not asked to identify their motivations for covering.

Name	Monetary Gain	Practice and Musical Improvement	Enjoyment of the Performance Itself
Matthew Collins	NA	NA	NA
Reece Vaitupu	100%	0%	0%
Samdrub Dawa	NA	NA	NA
Antonio Mercuri	80%	10%	10%
Tom Maxwell	70%	30%	0%
Daniel Shea	70%	10%	20%

Figure 1: Motivation for playing covers

Participants identified a range of reasons and motivations for covering, which all varied in emphasis. Figure 1 shows a strong inclination towards viewing covers as an endeavour based purely on monetary gain, though some participants reveal surprisingly high levels of enjoyment and musical improvement in relation to playing covers music, considering their identification with covers being stigmatised and purely pursued for monetary reasons. Though asked what percentages of these categories they would choose, some participants who chose to attribute 0% to their enjoyment of the performance itself later described enjoyment and satisfaction in relation to *some* elements of the performance. For example, Reece later stated that he enjoyed it when the band were ‘playing well’, or when the band ‘start sort of tinkering with songs’ in terms of improvisation and genre (Personal Communication 19 March 2015). Tom identified enjoyment in the form of performing a song in different ways depending on the room in which he was playing: ‘you can play it a completely different way, you can play it softly, play it heavy, play it quietly, singing softly, more breathy, and that’s . . . the chilled out thing, or, or really belting it . . . a bit busier. . .’ (Personal Communication 19 March 2015). Tom also goes on to argue that his solo performances for covers constitute ‘good practice’ (Personal Communication 19 March 2015). The participants then, do identify some pleasurable aspects of covering, especially involving creativity, despite identifying that the main goal of cover performances is monetary gain.

To expand on these hitherto nascent aspects of the practice of covering that transcend the motivating factor of monetary gain, Antonio identifies that covering is a part of others’ *identities* in the music scene, after discussing his initial view that covering was a ‘way to make money’:

I started learning how to play drums through playing covers. But that was just through school. But something sort of clicked when I met [other

Dunedin covers musicians], that there's a niche to be filled. And I started thinking about it differently as a way to make money. (Personal Communication 19 March 2015)

He continues, 'It's about 80% money, yeah. But I also, that's also a bonus, because I also enjoy it. But umm, I always enjoy it. I enjoy it because half the reason is I'm doing what I love and I'm making money out of it' (Personal Communication 19 March 2015). Here Antonio reaffirms that there are other benefits to playing cover music beyond the remuneration that it affords the individual, namely practice and enjoyment. His perspective emphasises the creative aspect of cover band participation, which is absent in Shuker's (2003) definition of cover bands, and Magnus, Magnus and Uidhir's (2013) definition of covers as 'mimic covers'. One might also argue that this complex position reveals the extent to which Antonio was an 'apprentice' of sorts, moving slowly towards becoming a musical performer of originals music. While the enjoyment of covering contributes to its appeal, participants have also identified that the quality of their musicianship is directly affected by covering. This is to be expected considering the development of musical skills described by the participants. More interestingly, I would argue that the relationship of Dunedin musicians to the act of covering is more complex and contradictory than a measurement of the pros and cons vis-à-vis monetary gain, practice and musical improvement, and enjoyment of the performance itself. Antonio's performance of covers contributes to a *range* of acts that he performs as a *musician*, and thus contributes to his identity.

Covers Stigma: Covers as 'Contamination'

A key concern for this article is the kinds of relationships that Dunedin covers musicians have with purely originals musicians—and what these relationships mean vis-à-vis the formation and enactment of their identity. The participants identified a perceived stigma (in varied forms) in relation to the act of covering for monetary gain. Some interviewees identified this stigma as self-produced; others identified it as a perceived phenomenon; others suggested it was catalysed by their interactions with other members of the music community in Dunedin, including audience members. In relation to the Sydney music scene, Morrow (2006, 182) argues that covers stigmatisation can be understood as a kind of 'contamination', in that cover musicians are identified by other musicians and 'creatives' within the musical scene as creatively and artistically 'contaminated' if they engage in the act and industry of covering for money. Morrow goes on to argue that 'musicians who employ this strategy are encouraged to keep their two operations entirely separate and to proceed with caution through this minefield of signification' (2006, 182). In other words, performing as a covers musician is a risky semiotic engagement for musicians who wish to assimilate themselves with the indie/originals community.

As identified by Morrow in relation to the Sydney music industry (2006, 182), Reece also argues that the practice of covering actively funds the band's originals pursuits;

however, he is tentative about future covers gigs. This tentativeness stems from a self-identified lack of desire to perform covers in place of originals, and a stigma that Reece associates with covering within the Dunedin music community. Reece's testimony highlights this tension:

I've just heard rumours, mostly I think you're viewed as playing covers as kind of, maybe not lesser of a musician, . . . but, like, definitely not viewed as good as an original musician. . . . It's like you're cheating on music or something. (Personal Communication, 19 March 2015)

Reece clearly identifies the perception that covers practitioners are in some ways both 'lesser' than original musicians in terms of the ways in which they are perceived within the music community, and suggests that covers practitioners are seen as 'cheating' on music. Here he positions this stigma within an oppositional binary between originals and covers musicians, and seems to valorise each with competing representations of 'artistic' and 'unartistic'. The logical ramification of this valorisation may be to adopt a modified identity position in the music community based on this stigma in regard to covering. Reece's perspective emphasises the *perceived* stigma within the music community; however, he also identifies moments of direct insults based on his status as a cover musician. Reece explains that '[w]e did have people saying to [a member of the band] only a few months ago, oh "how's the covers band going?", like, as a dig' (Personal Communication 19 March 2015). The idea that Reece's now mainly originals music band is referred to as a covers band pejoratively, articulates the stigma attached to covering music in comparison to the opposing framing of 'authentic' original music practitioners.⁶

Tom argues that this stigma in some cases stemmed from musicians who played originals, but did not perform covers professionally. Tom states, 'a lot of it is people that purely do originals [that disagree]—and I completely understand that as well, which is why I never take offence, because I can completely understand their way of thinking' (Personal Communication 19 March 2015). Another participant perceived the stigmatic tension as a matter of 'jealousy' (Personal Communication 19 March 2015): 'I'd say it's umm, like, people understand it, from the musician scene, only because so many of us do it. But I think there is a stigma, and I think that's semi-pathetic. And I think it's a bit of jealousy as well' (Personal Communication 19 March 2015). The participant went on to explain that he surmised that the 'jealousy' might be based on the lucrative nature of the covering endeavours, including the relatively short amount of time required to play a covers gig in relation to the amount paid for the performance. Antonio argues that other members of the public also widely stigmatise the labour of covers musicians: 'You always get asked, you know, "wha-do-ya do?" "When are you gonna get a real job?" You know, that's the classic' (Personal Communication 19 March 2015). Some citizens of Dunedin position Antonio's profession as a covers practitioner as illegitimate in relation to wider societal values. Importantly, Antonio himself also frames this reaction as typical in relation to his vocation. Here it is important to note

that the 'stigma' of playing covers as a form of labour extends beyond the music scene and into wider social groups. Daniel Shea of originals band Incarnate described an audience member at a covers gig inquiring why he 'degrades himself' by playing covers songs (Personal Communication 19 March 2015). Further, this individual reportedly stated that Daniel was 'too good' to be playing other people's songs, thus restructuring the insult as a compliment (Personal Communication 19 March 2015). A prominent stigma then is attached to the playing of covers in Dunedin, and this stigma can be seen as extending *beyond* the views of originals musicians that do not perform covers (Personal Communication 19 March 2015).

Existing literature tends to emphasise the uncreative nature of the practice of covering and its lack of artistic credibility (Shuker 2003; Magnus, Magnus and Uidhir 2013). Indeed, the cover artist—who may be playing in a bar setting, at events, weddings, festivals and the like—uses particular songs as sonic cues for the audience, which are important to understand as sonic markers from the rock canon and give a definite structure to their performances. However, covers in Dunedin feature improvisations that stretch beyond the original recorded versions of the songs, and create new 'versions' of cover songs that augment and re-structure the cover in inventive and novel ways. For example, performances of cover songs may take on wildly different arrangements when performed by Dunedin musicians—they may be stretched, with 'jam' sections added where the musicians improvise extensively. One of the participants, Matthew Collins, states that when playing as a supporting member of his band for his lead singer, 'I think the understanding that you follow him musically as well is quite good in this situation because, he knows when to take a solo, when to, sing a part' (Personal Communication 19 March 2015). Matthew goes on to describe the long and spontaneously improvised sections that he supports as a bass player when covering with this group, and notes how extemporaneous the structure of the song is when performed. Structures for Matthew are often decided in the moment, in relation to the improvisation of the lead singer/guitar player, and in relation to the attention and interaction with the audience. These spontaneous manipulations of arrangements are cued in an ad hoc manner, which suggests refined improvisational skills and structural musical knowledge. These structural improvisations may not necessarily contain the trademark sonic language of particular electronic and acoustic sounds that feature in the original song. Performances may feature different instrumentation, they may be adapted to a different genre, and various other changes may append and augment the original canonical version of the song. In this way, the practice of covering reveals new ways in which musicians, and indeed audiences, interact with 'classic' covers songs, and suggest that scholars have yet to understand the way that covers music acts as a musical foundation for performances that are fluid, protean, and extemporaneous.

Conclusion

The perspectives of Dunedin musicians presented in this article with regard to their use of covering express complex notions of identity in relation to performing covers, which feature contradictory perspectives regarding their position as both originals and covers practitioners. Participants experienced a range of identity formations—covers practitioners, labourers, artists, originals musicians—all of which shift in terms of their relation to the practice of performing music. Some participants argued that they were simply musicians who performed in different modalities, while others openly rejected the practice of covering as a ‘lesser’ form of musicianship vis-à-vis originals music-making. However, interestingly, when positioning themselves in terms of identity, most of the participants recognised their covers-musician status only in relation to specific questions. While identifying with the stigma that came with the practice of playing covers for monetary gain in the Dunedin music scene, participants did not themselves contemplate the idea outside of oppositional comments from other members of the community and wider social groups. The participants generally identified themselves as a ‘covers musician’ when the stigma of covers musicians was discussed. Otherwise, participants first identified themselves as musicians. The existing covers literature presents the ‘song’ as the most important element of debate concerning the practice of covering; however, the perspectives of participants in this article reveal the extent to which the practice impacts positively on their creation of original music in terms of increased ability to invest monetarily in their originals pursuits, increased performance and practice time from covers gigs, and in some cases an increase in their ability to construct and arrange songs. Due to the complex and oppositional ways in which musicians articulate their identity formations, and the comprehensive relationship between originals music-making and covering in terms of creative musical innovation that my ethnography reveals, it is clear that covering is an inherent part of the identities of Dunedin musicians.

Notes

1. See Males (2015) and Julian Temple Band (2015) for links to these bands’ social media pages; see Holdsworth (2013) for a review of Julian Temple Band, and FasterLouder (2014) for a review of the Males performance at the Big Sound festival in Brisbane, Australia.
2. It is useful to note that this paper is not interested in tribute performers and groups, which generally focus on appropriating the exact cultural image and aesthetic qualities of a particular group or artist (Gregory 2012). In the context of Dunedin music-making, musicians are acting as an independent musical act when they perform, which does not trade upon or invest in the visual image and particularly the *iconography* of the artist they are covering.
3. Magnus, Magnus and Uidhir’s work also defines ‘different kinds of covers’, the historical nature of covers and their canonization, and their relationship to the original canonized works, which is, however, beyond our purposes here (2013, 361).
4. See Smithies (2014) for a review of current bands and how they are re-framed within the ethos and sonic aesthetic of the historical Dunedin Sound movement.
5. For concision I do not have space here to discuss the ramifications of authenticity in relation to Dunedin Sound artists of the past and today. However, for a useful discussion of

authenticity and popular music see Moore (2002). Also, for a useful outline of the aesthetics and scene-dynamics of the Dunedin Sound, see Dale (2011).

6. Here I utilise the term 'authentic' to refer to original Dunedin music-making that emphasizes DIY, impecuniousness, valorising original musical compositions as artistically more worthwhile than the practice of covering, and in some cases the legacy of the Dunedin Sound as above. I do not wish to invoke the range of argument concerning authenticity in popular music as expressed, for example, Moore (2002).

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