Borrowing in American music

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The use in a piece of music of one or more elements taken from another specific piece. Borrowing is a recurring theme in American music, encompassing a wide variety of practices.

From colonial times, Americans have created new songs by adapting existing music to new words. Hymnodists reshaped secular tunes as hymn tunes, including melodies by classical composers. Patriotic and protest songs often borrow tunes; even the national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner," joins words by Francis Scott Key to John Stafford Smith's tune for the English drinking song "To Anacreon in Heaven" (*c*1775). Satire, parody, and humor are often associated with setting new words to familiar melodies, from Ballad opera in the United States and Minstrelsy to the music of Weird Al Yankovic. Adapting existing music in new media or new arrangements is equally common. Arrangements are generally received as versions of the original work, but variations, paraphrases, potpourris, medleys, and other works based on familiar tunes are clear instances of borrowing. Preludes and fantasies on hymn tunes, like Clarence Eddy's *Festival Prelude and Fugue on "Old Hundred,"* are staples of the church organist's repertoire.

Another form of borrowing is the use of an existing piece as a starting point or model. Examples abound in the classical tradition; for example, Edward MacDowell modeled his *Eroica Sonata* on Liszt's Piano Sonata in B Minor. Borrowing from a model is also evident in vernacular music. Melodies of some 19th-century American popular songs and hymns are related, as if a songwriter began with a fragment of a familiar tune and extended it.

Composers in the classical tradition have frequently adapted folksongs and other national melodies, using borrowing to give their music a national, regional, or ethnic flavor, as in Louis Moreau Gottschalk's piano pieces on melodies from Spain, the United States, and Latin America. In the early 1890s, Dvorˇák urged American composers to look toward African American spirituals, American Indian music, or Anglo-American folk music as sources for an Americanist style, and many composers adapted melodies from these traditions as themes. Charles Ives more often drew on popular and patriotic songs and hymns, believing that music in popular culture was most representative of America. His music illustrates the variety of borrowing procedures composers used, from traditional techniques such as modeling, variation, paraphrase, medley, and programmatic Quotation in American music to innovations like cumulative form, in which the borrowed theme appears in full only near the end and is preceded by development of its motives. The effect or meaning conveyed varies as much as the methods, from depicting the performance of music and thus the situation in which it was heard (like the trumpet playing *Taps* at a memorial service in *Decoration Day*, *c*1913–19) to meditations on the musical material itself (as in his violin sonatas). Ives's most striking invention was Collage in American music, in which a swirl of quoted and paraphrased tunes is added to the musical fabric.

Postwar composers often reworked earlier music in order to address their relationship to the past musical tradition. In *Contra Mortem et Tempus* and *Music for the Magic Theater* (both 1965), George Rochberg juxtaposed passages quoted or derived from earlier composers with his own music, seeking to evoke "the many-layered density of human existence"; he called his *Nach Bach* (1966) for harpsichord a "commentary" on Bach's Partita No. 6 in E Minor, interspersing fragments and transformations of it with free atonal passagework. Lukas Foss's *Baroque Variations* (1967) distorts works by Handel, Domenico Scarlatti, and Bach by making parts inaudible, fading in and out, echoing passages in different rhythms, adding and subtracting notes, and using clusters, indeterminacy, and other avant-garde effects. In such works, the contrasts between the borrowed material and the often strange ways it is transformed or juxtaposed with quite different music can be fascinating and expressive, commenting on the fragmented, pluralistic culture and music of the modern era or on the gulf separating present from past. In *Cheap Imitation* (1969), John Cage used chance operations to reshape the melodic line of Erik Satie's *Socrate* by transposing segments of varying lengths into different keys, and his *Hymns and Variations* (1979) takes partsongs by William Billings and deletes portions of individual voices, again using chance; these works challenge received ideas of authorship, ownership, and the integrity of the musical work.

Since the 1980s, composers have often borrowed to represent a blending of idioms rather than disjunction. Philip Glass based his *Low Symphony* (1992) on themes drawn from the experimental pop recording *Low* by David Bowie and Brian Eno, drawing their work into the symphonic world. American composers of Chinese descent, such as Tan Dun and Bright Sheng, incorporated Chinese melodies and sounds into works in Western genres to create a hybrid that bridges both cultures.

Borrowing is also common in popular music. Tin Pan Alley songwriters of the 1890s through 1920s frequently quoted a familiar song just before the end of the chorus, as in Irving Berlin's "Alexander's Ragtime Band" (1911), which quotes Foster's "Old Folks at Home." The musical reference is normally alluded to in the text, which may borrow words from the quoted song or describe a performance of the quoted music. George M. Cohan's "The Yankee Doodle Boy" (1904) quotes "Yankee Doodle" like this in the chorus, but the verse is a Patchwork of patriotic tunes, a technique used by many songwriters. Quotation for humorous effect or in relation to a text continues to the present, as in Pam Tillis's 1992 country song that uses the much-quoted "hoochie-coochie" dance (first quoted in James Thornton's "Streets of Cairo" in 1895) to pun on the singer's comment that she is "the Queen of Denial" (i.e. "the Nile").

Musicians in popular traditions often rework or quote classical music. Numerous Tin Pan Alley and Broadway songs were about classical music or opera and quoted well-known works. Louis Armstrong quoted *Rigoletto*, *Pagliacci*, and other operas in his improvised solos. Robert Wright and George Forrest based their musical *Kismet* (1954) on melodies by Borodin. Duke Ellington adapted Tchaikovsky and Grieg for jazz band in his *Nutcracker Suite* and *Peer Gynt Suite* (1960). Emerson, Lake, and Palmer reworked Musorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* and Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man* as rock music, and Malcolm McLaren's songs "Madam Butterfly," "Death of Butterfly," and "Carmen" on his 1984 album *Fans* were intriguing retellings of the operas' stories in dance-pop style, woven around the heroines' most famous arias. The motivations for borrowing from classical sources have ranged from recycling good melodies to humor or commentary.

Reuse, reworking, and extension of existing music, all basic elements of West African musical practice, continued in African American music. Blues and Jazz involve improvisation and composition based on existing melodies and chord progressions, and similar practices continued into popular music derived from African American traditions, including Rhythm and blues and Rock. Jazz improvisers quoted familiar tunes in their solos as a joke or meaningful Allusion, or borrowed passages from recorded solos by other artists. In the early 1940s, Bop artists created numerous "contrafacts," new jazz melodies to the chord "changes" (harmonic progressions) of popular tunes, such as Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie's "Anthropology" and "Shaw 'Nuff"; both use the chord progression of George Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm," the most frequent source for contrafacts. This practice allowed artists to invent melodies in the new jazz style, yet continue to improvise on familiar harmonic patterns.

Film music has relied on existing music from the beginning, as accompanists to silent films matched emotionally appropriate music to events on the screen. Orchestral scores for silent films, such as Joseph Carl Breil's score for *Birth of a Nation* (1915), and for early sound films such as *The Jazz Singer* (1927) often drew on existing music. When original scores were commissioned, composers used models or adapted music with strong associations. Max Steiner's music for *King Kong* (1933) adopted Wagner's leitmotive system and echoed the Fasolt and Fafner motive from *Das Rheingold* in Kong's leitmotive. Later film scores draw on all of these traditions. Some are pastiches, as in *American Graffiti* (1973), which uses American pop music of the 1950s to convey time, place, and situation; others are modeled on existing works, like John Williams's score for *Star Wars* (1977), which echoes passages from Gustav Holst's *The Planets*. Similar techniques are used in music for television and for advertising, where familiar music can lend certain associations to a product.

New forms of borrowing emerged with developments in recording technology in the late 20th century. Pop musicians overlaid new and borrowed elements in the recording studio; an early example was Simon and Garfunkel's "Save the Life of My Child" (1968), in which the opening of their first hit recording "The Sounds of Silence" (1965) was dubbed into an interlude. In the late 1970s, Disco artists frequently used previously recorded bass and rhythm tracks as a backing for new songs. The new genre of Rap emerged from an African American practice of improvising rhymed poetry over instrumental passages from existing disco or funk recordings; the first rap recording to hit the top 40 in the pop charts, "Rapper's Delight" (1979) by the Sugar Hill Gang, used excerpts from Chic's slow disco hit "Good Times" (1979). The invention of digital Sampling and sequencing, hip hop made manipulation of recorded material easier, and rap recordings began to include many more "samples," digitally recorded snippets of music, speech, or sounds. Public Enemy's "Night of the Living Baseheads" (1988) includes samples from 19 different songs, each of which adds meaning and resonance to the song's anti-drug and anti-racist message. Samples have been used by many others besides rap musicians, notably in the *Plunderphonics* (1989) of John Oswald, which directly engages issues of ownership through a kind of creative theft. Digital manipulation has grown in the 21st century with new software for music file sharing and editing. A characteristic new form is the Mash-up, which combines layers or segments from multiple source recordings to create juxtapositions laden with meaning or humor.

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