

Cover or original?

Streaming sites are changing the way we listen to music. Some record labels are opting out while cover bands are profiting.

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Associated Press

There are about 600 versions of Adele's Oscar-winning song "Skyfall" on the Spotify subscription music service. Not one of them features Adele. Adele's label, XL Recordings, keeps her music off the all-you-can-listen subscription plans until download sales peter out. In the meantime, copycat artists fill the void, racking up royalty revenue, often before customers realize they have been listening to someone else.

Alice Bonde Nissen found that out the hard way. She once paid \$17 a month for Spotify's premium service in Denmark. Nissen found a version of "Skyfall" and mistakenly clicked on a "follow" button to become a fan of GM-Presents and Jocelyn Scofield, a cover-song specialist with some 4,600 Spotify followers. Scofield, has the most listened-to cover of "Skyfall" on the service.

"When I found out ... that I couldn't find the original 'Skyfall' (and some other hits), I decided to quit Spotify," Nissen said.

Thousands of cover songs crowd digital music services such as Spotify and Rhapsody and listeners are getting annoyed. The phenomenon threatens the growth of these services — which have millions of paying subscribers — and could hold back the tepid recovery of a music industry still reeling from the decline of the CD.

Cover songs are legal in the U.S. and have a long tradition in the music industry. Some covers are even more famous than the originals. Which do you think of first, Aretha Franklin's soaring 1967 version of "Respect," or Otis Redding's original from two years earlier? How about Jimi Hendrix's funky 1968 rendition of "All Along the Watchtower"? Does anyone even remember that Bob Dylan wrote and sang it in a release six months before?

Spotify's head of development and analysis, Sachin Doshi, acknowledged that finding covers instead of originals can be frustrating.

"We recognize it's a problem we haven't fully solved yet," Doshi said.

Obtaining a license to record a cover is easy and inexpensive. Services such as Google Inc.'s Limelight, which launched in late 2009, offer commercial song licenses to anyone who fills out a form. For each song they cover, artists pay a \$15 fee. By law, Limelight also charges \$9.10 in advance for every 100 downloads the artists may sell. TuneCore, which launched in 2006, distributes songs on outlets like iTunes for \$10 per track. Selling a couple hundred



CHRIS PIZZELLO / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Hundreds of copycat versions of Adele's Oscar-winning song "Skyfall" appear on Spotify's subscription service. XL Recordings keeps her music off of streaming services until the download sales slow. Cover artists collect royalty revenue, often before customers realize they were listening to someone else.

tracks — because of consumer confusion or otherwise — can earn cover artists enough money to make a living.

The hurdle is so low for the average amateur that once a hit song comes out, it is covered quickly. Take "Suit & Tie," a Justin Timberlake song released by RCA Records in January.

There are already about 180 covers on Spotify.

Since Adele's "Skyfall" was released in October, it has sold more than 1.9 million copies in the United States. Cover artists sold more than 54,000 copies, according to Nielsen SoundScan. The top-selling cover was produced by Movie Sounds Unlimited, a subsidiary of German mu-

sic publisher BMG, and sold more than 9,800 units.

While some people make covers to get discovered, others seem to be in it to trick buyers and make a fast buck. A search for popular artists on Spotify reveals plenty of me-too bands who pick deceptive artist names such as the "Bruno Mars Tributators" or song names such as "Firework (As Made Famous By Katy Perry)." The artwork and graphics used for their songs are sometimes a mirror image of the originals.

It is a big business, with millions of dollars invested, and Movie Sounds' parent Countdown Media has a catalog of more than 50,000 covers. Digital music stores have made knockoffs profitable in a way that would not be possible with physical stores.

Brian Felsen, the president of CDBaby, another independent song distributor, said that while a gray area exists today, the deluge of covers cannot really be stopped.

"Everybody polices it as much as you can," he said, adding that his staff attempts to prevent knockoffs that copy cover art and use other deceptive practices from being distributed. He said that having so many covers isn't good for consumers.

"It may not be illegal or immoral, but it may not be the best thing for society at large either."

BRIAN FELSEN

Music Streaming Services



Spotify.com — Music streaming, social media application



Last.fm — Online radio, music recommendation service



Rhapsody.com — Paid subscription to online music library.



JOHN MARSHALL / ASSOCIATED PRESS

About 180 covers of Justin Timberlake's song "Suit & Tie" have been uploaded to Spotify.

It's a bird! It's a plane! It's 75!

MATT MOORE
Associated Press

What to get Superman for his 75th birthday? DC Entertainment's starting with a new logo.

The company, part of Warner Bros. Entertainment, unveiled the new logo Thursday in honor of Superman's 75th anniversary. It ties in the iconic character's familiar red and blue colors, along with his ever-present cape, and the words "75 Years."

Comic book "Superman Unchained" by DC co-publisher Jim Lee and writer Scott Snyder will be the first to feature the new logo on its June 12 cover. Portions of a new animated short being produced by "300" and "Man of Steel" director Zack Snyder will be

All things Superman

- ✓ First appeared in Action Comics No. 1, 1938.
- ✓ Doomsday killed Superman in 1992, but the caped hero quickly returned.
- ✓ Neil DeGrasse Tyson estimated Krypton was 27 light-years from Earth.
- ✓ "Man of Steel" opens in theaters June 14

shown at San Diego Comic-Con in July. Snyder's finished version will debut in full this summer.

Warner Bros. CEO Kevin Tsujihara said Thursday the new logo is part of a yearlong celebration of what he called the "first

super hero" whose exploits have jumped from the pages of comic books to radio, television, movies (the latest incarnation, "Man of Steel," opens June 14) and video games.

"We are proud to commemorate this milestone with exciting entertainment across the entire studio and across the globe, ensuring this enduring icon reaches new generations of audiences," he said of the character created in Cleveland by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster in June 1938.

Diane Nelson, president of DC Entertainment, called Superman "undeniably the greatest super hero in the world and likely the most influential comic book character of all time."



In celebration of his 75th anniversary, comic book hero Superman is getting a reworked logo from DC Entertainment.