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Project Title: Original Artist Identity in Song

UOA 33: Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies

300-Word Statement

Original Artist Identity in Song examines the variables deployed when constructing public-facing identity in original songs, and the interaction of artist identity within the market ecology of popular music.

The 2017 album, *CousteauX* (published by Blue Mountain Music, and released through Edel/Orchard in Europe and the USA), is a case study in the construction of artist identity. A journal article in the inaugural *Songwriting Studies Journal*, part of the AHRC-funded Songwriting Studies Research Network based at Birmingham City University, provides contextualising evidence in examining this approach. Insights into the inner workings of creative practice arise, and the analytical auto-ethnographic method observes practice for patterns and themes in the songwriting, production and touring phases of the album's release. This practice develops a model with which to expose those song variables with bearing on the public impression of the original artist.

Analysis is structured by the principles of optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991). This social identity theory suggests that individuals make behavioural choices seeking a social balance between drives to assimilate and drives to differentiate. This theory has been adapted and utilised by product designers, social psychiatrists and market researchers as they balance typicality and novelty in consumer products. Its principles are adopted to underpin a conceptual framework for understanding aspects of similarity and difference active within song, as well as assimilation and distinction in relation to outward socioeconomic dimensions: peers, gatekeepers and audiences. A model emerges that anatomizes the creative choices negotiated by original artists seeking to communicate distinctive identity through original songs. The project aimed to inform songwriting studies in particular relation to the way original artists construct identity in the public domain.