

Standard Practices: Intertextuality and Improvisation in Jazz
Performances of Recent Popular Music

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Since the early days of the jazz tradition, jazz musicians have played popular songs, from the standards of the Great American Songbook to music by Radiohead and Michael Jackson. In recent decades, such cross-genre borrowing has become commonplace in popular music, producing covers ranging from the imaginative to the banal. How has the prominence of this cover phenomenon reconfigured the playing of popular music by jazz musicians? Are recent popular songs simply new standards? Or has jazz's standard practice become just another case of genre crossing in a polyglot musical culture?

For an omnivorous listener steeped in both the jazz standard tradition and the flexibility of modern genre-crossing, I'll suggest in this paper that jazz performances of recent popular music can be both. In several short analyses, I'll demonstrate how particular jazz performances creatively balance intertextual fidelity to a source recording with an improvisatory freedom that remains a hallmark of jazz practice. This rich interplay between creation and transformation lies at the heart of these thoroughly postmodern hybrids.