

SLIDE 1: Title

SLIDE 2: Audio test

SLIDE 3: Live from Liperpool

Of course, musicology, has its part to play in the field of LBGTQIA scholarship. The discipline is doing so at a time when it's growing out beyond the bounds of asking 'how queer *is* a German sixth?' and 'Was Perotin gay?'. If musicology so far lacks the *savour faire* of ethnographers, it's still managed to broaden its resources for rendering textual and social insight, and for revealing 'the magic of things' LBGTQIA.

So, with this panel in mind, I looked, for this occasion, at a random but appropriate theme that might interest the RMA but which it had not yet tackled, and I chose lip-synching, unaware that Jacob Mallinson Bird had also picked this subject for this conference. So, I will cruise down a different path to his.

SLIDE 4: Sink The Pink crew

Possibly like Jacob I like lip-synching because the more radical of its articulations form a part of that queer burlesque world that meshes parody, camp and critique with advocacy of sexual liberation and social progress. It does so through public performance, using for the most part recorded popular music (especially song), sometimes collaged in cut-and-paste fashion with the speech and declamations of celebrity figures past and present, whose voices are represented through mime, to which is added costume, a hairpiece or two, and dramatic - if not histrionic - gesture.

What's distinctive about lip-synching as an act of performance is that the sound is removed from its source through recording and is attached to another, zoetic, object. In the most conservative form, such as that found in developing countries by artists like Thai ladyboys, lip-synching is considered to be an aspirational act of 'realness' that emulates the material glamour of the celebrities in their most mediatised form. In contrast, in its more radical state, synching internally fractures this and exposes the mechanics of its manufactured being (for example, when Eleanor Fogg and Rodent Decay use slowed-down recordings). What's constructed as a representation of the integral figure is unmasked as a fabrication. The act opens itself out as a critique of authenticity [sincerity [candour]].

SLIDE 5 Lipsync Battle

In either form - imitation or fabrication - lip-synchers are mute not in order to hear themselves but to hear the voices they represent. So far, the soundless lips and tongue have inspired Irigaray-ean scholarship to wander down mythologising byways that lead into the thorn-strewn forest of the phantasmagoric, the animus, and the wolf-haunted paths of psychoanalysis. We're even asked to consider the animated soul of the record, the radio and the loudspeaker, as though those who email radio DJs to request *Despacito* or *The Lark Ascending* are unaware that most — if not all — of the staff at the station are alive and kicking. Lip-syncing is a corporeal act, the product of a rationally accountable technical procedure. The synchronisation between a recorded voice and the mouth of an actor impersonating its cause, is a principle constituent — as you well know — of the film industry practice known as 'playback'. The whole operation is a practical consequence of the inception of sound film. It developed from the late 1920s onwards, prominently in Hollywood and Mumbai. It didn't take long for audiences to be aware of this technical arrangement and accept it, as Deanna Durbin displays in this skit:

SLIDE 6 : CLIP: DEANNA DURBIN 'LOVER' 0.21"

Nowadays, hiding the lips takes on a more culturally charged significance, as shown by the wonderfully-named Asifa Lahore:

SLIDE 7: CLIP: ISIFA LAHORE - 'PUNJABI GIRL' 0.21"

SLIDE 8: TAPE MACHINE

'Playback' forms the most economically effective means of recording a musical item, especially where the choreography of cameras and dancers are involved. It's also an effective means of improving poor singing by uniting the voice of a good singer with the face of bad one. While it derives its place in queer culture from this transaction, a second practical issue played its historical part in venues where the microphone was reserved for the use of the compère and the disc jockey, or - in devalorised bars - not available at all.

Yet those academics who have referred to lip-syncing in their writings — including Brian Kane and Philip Auslander — have tended to identify it within three categories: - the lips themselves, with ventriloquism, and thirdly with Pierre Schaeffer's theory of the acousmatic. Considering lips, this over-emphasises the value of them in this context, landing us too far close to Irigaray's thoughts on lips (labial, too), which are 'threshold to

the body' and, in Margaret Whitford's gloss, are 'strangers to dichotomy', disengaged from the binary thinking of phallogocentric logic. Nevertheless, what we have on stage is not lip-synching so much as voice-synching.

As to ventriloquism, it's mentioned by the likes of Ric Altman and Steven Connor who refer to, 'the body receiving a voice'. But in ventriloquism a voice animates a body, while in lip-synching a body animates a voice. There may be different voices but one body.

This leaves us with Schaeffer's four modes of listening, of which *entendre* presents the morphology of the sound when its source or cause is bracketed off. But actually in lip synching the space of signification is filled by the lip-synching replacement. The presence of the mime makes that space a medium for (quoting Schaeffer) 'some other thing', the cause of which lives on like a residue.

Why do this fabricating act? Elizabeth Kaminski and Vesta Taylor have dealt with this convincingly in their essay of 2008 titled *We're not just lip-synching up here: Music and collective identity in drag performances*. They spent three years researching at a Florida drag club. They divide the use of music into four categories:

SLIDE 9: RITUAL

First, Ritual as a statement of queerness. Songs such as *I Will Survive* and *We Are Family*.

SLIDE 10: EDUCATION

Secondly, Education, that is, educating heterosexual audiences, with songs such as *Automatic* and *I Kissed a Girl*.

SLIDE 11; DISIDENTIFICATION

Thirdly Disidentification: parody, mockery and critique, using the likes of *Barbie Girl* and *Pour Me a Man*.

SLIDE 12: INTERACTION

Lastly, social interaction between gay and non-gay audience members, thanks to *Dancing Queen* and *Hey, Big Spender*.

The title of Kaminski and Taylor's essay came from a newspaper interview where a lipsyncher claimed (quote), 'We're not just lip-synching up here, we're changing people's lives by showing people what we're all about'.

As for my own research, i've interviewed four lip-synching artists so far, and I'll refer here to two of them who operate in different *milieu*: one works in theatres and the other in clubs.

SLIDE 13: DICKIE BEAU PORTRAIT

Dicky Beau is a young British performance artist who was introduced to lip-synching by the San Francisco 'drag artist' Suppository Spelling. Spelling mingles songs with talk-show material, and in doing so, Beau claims, undercuts the meaning of the song. There is a paradox, too, in the intimacy and grand gesture of the same stage object working occasionally in contradiction. Beau works with a stage director rather than a mirror, and he choreographs himself. He tells me that he imagines what the sounds might do if they were travelling through his body. He is highly gestural. Here he is in multiple pose, taking on what I assume is The King's Singers:

SLIDE 14: CLIP: BEAU: WALTZING MATHILDA 0.19"

SLIDE 15: BEAU AS GARLAND

Beau's acclaimed evocation of Judy Garland is carefully placed at one remove from her public identity. He has her dressed in the habit of Mr. Punch's Judy, and through his gestures - buccal *and* somatic - Beau signals the comfortless nature of Garland's inebriated howl of a star groomed from girlhood by the film industry, trying now to obtain independent agency as a woman. Beau lip-synchs a revelatory recording of Garland drunk in her dressing room, claiming that (quote) 'I'm the one who's had to live with me'. Beau uses underscore music, not to cue so much as to generate a flow through which he can work gesturally. I have witnessed audiences very moved by this embodiment of Garland's diatribe, and Stephen Farrier has written an insightful journal article about it.

SLIDE 16: CHEDDAR G

Cheddar Gorgeous is the big cheese of Manchester's Family Gorgeous, and stage partner of Anna Phylactic. Cheddar is otherwise Michael, and so I will talk here of him, although you'll notice his drag name is neutral. Cheddar and Anna run a monthly Manchester club called *Cha Cha Boudoir*, at which the audience are handed 'drag dollars' to vote for their favourite lip-syncher of the evening. On each club night there is a theme which the lip-synchers must address. A recent one was Brexit.

Each act puts together a music sequence using Garage Band, very rough and ready, Cheddar tells me. The sound provides the variety the act needs to keep an audience attentive. Here's Cheddar and a few of his crew lip-synching, not too well:

SLIDE 17: AIN'T NO MOUNTAIN 0.47"

Cheddar emphasises that the songs are references, edited to build a story which must be coherent and bigger than the artist. He admits that he misses cues when the audience is screaming. He learns the lyrics over and over again until it's embodied in the memory. Singing will break the magic, he claims, so you have to make a gap. In my view this is the void identified by Schaefer, absent of source and cause, but which in fact is open for use - what David McDougall calls the 'interpretive space'.

SLIDE 18: BREXIT TABLE

Here is the list of tracks for Cheddar and Anna's response to the Brexit theme:

There are five music tracks, crudely edited into each other, where key, texture and tempo clash. The key is column 4, the tempo column 5. You will see that the songs' keys tend to collide, the tempi jolt, and you would hear that the music editing is roughly handled, in my view for a dual function, one physical — to maintain energy — and one editorial, to denude the song of its fabricated sincerity.

I have eaten up my allotted time. If you have been, thanks for listening, and, as RuPaul orders you, 'REF for your life'.

SLIDE 19: References and sources

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