THE DENIAL OF A GENERAL PERFORMANCE RIGHT IN SOUND RECORDINGS: A POLICY THAT FACILITATES OUR DEMOCRATIC CIVIL SOCIETY?

Shourin W Sen

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/shourin_sen/1/
THE DENIAL OF A GENERAL PERFORMANCE RIGHT IN SOUND RECORDINGS: A POLICY THAT FACILITATES OUR DEMOCRATIC CIVIL SOCIETY?

Shourin Sen

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION .................................................................234
II. COPYRIGHT FRAMEWORK .......................................................236
   A. Performance Royalties ..................................................236
   B. Statistical Analysis of the Rise of the Performer-Songwriter .............................................240
III. EMERGING BUSINESS STRUCTURES ..................................243
   A. Equitable Distribution by Performance Rights Societies ................................................243
   B. Industry Expansion .......................................................246
   C. Dominance of the Musical Recording over Sheet Music .....................................................248
   D. Spread of the Performer-Songwriter Movement: Fringe Genres .....................................249
   E. Spread of the Performer-Songwriter Movement: Mainstream Popular Culture ......................251
IV. CULTURAL IMPACT ............................................................253
   A. Increase in the Number of Songwriters ..................................253
   B. Differences in Composition Processes ..................................256
   C. Politically and Socially Forward-Leaning Content: Historical Analysis .................................258
   D. Politically and Socially Forward-Leaning Content: Empirical Analysis ..................................259
V. LEGISLATIVE IMPLICATIONS ................................................262
   A. Efficiency and Fairness ....................................................262
   B. Copyright as a Means to Facilitate Democratic Civil Society .......................................264
   C. The Limited Digital Audio Transmission Right .................................................................265
VI. CONCLUSION .................................................................267

* B.M., Music Performance, Northwestern University, 2001; M.M., Jazz Studies, New England Conservatory of Music, 2003; J.D., Boston University School of Law, 2007. I sincerely thank Wendy Gordon, Matthew Leary, Anneke Schaul-Yoder, Frank Laforge, and the editors at the Harvard Journal of Law and Technology for their comments, inspiration and assistance. This article is dedicated to Steve Lacy, in loving memory, with a black and white photograph on the first stave.
I. INTRODUCTION

John Coltrane’s recording of the song *My Favorite Things*¹ is an example of his striking ingenuity. On the recording, Coltrane performs a fourteen-minute “overhaul . . . of the saccharine show tune” originally from *The Sound of Music.*² Some commentators have claimed that jazz musicians would not play *My Favorite Things* today, “had Coltrane not established its surprising potential.”³ Despite Coltrane’s transformative contributions, the Copyright Act does not grant him, as the performer, the right to exclude others from publicly performing his rendition.⁴ Coltrane is not entitled to receive royalties when his recording is played on the radio, on television, or in a public setting such as a restaurant or hotel.⁵ Rather, the Copyright Act grants the composers of *My Favorite Things,* Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein, the exclusive right to authorize the analog public performance of the song.⁶

For more than three-quarters of a century, the inability of musical performers to profit from the public performance of their recordings has inspired heated controversy.⁷ Legal scholars have traditionally cast this controversy as David versus Goliath, with musicians struggling to get their due from the broadcast monoliths.⁸ Nearly all of the articles published on the subject bemoan the plight of the musical performer.⁹ Members of Congress have also joined the fray, proposing at

---

4. See 17 U.S.C. §§ 106(4), 106(6) (2000) (granting a full public performance right for authors of “musical works” but only a partial public performance right for authors of “sound recordings”); see also id. § 114(a) (“[T]he exclusive rights of the owner of copyright in a sound recording . . . do not include any right of performance under § 106(4).”).
5. Playing sound recordings in these settings qualifies as a public performance. See H.R. REP. NO. 94-1476, at 63 (1976), reprinted in 1976 U.S.C.C.A.N. 5659, 5676–77 (“[A] broadcasting network is performing when it transmits [a] performance (whether simultaneously or from records),” and “a cable television system is performing when it retransmits the broadcast to its subscribers . . . .”); Herbert v. Shanley Co., 242 U.S. 591, 595 (1917) (Holmes, J.) (holding that performance in a restaurant or hotel infringes the copyright owner’s public performance right).
9. See, e.g., Kara M. Wolke, *Some Catching Up to Do,* 7 VAND. J. ENT. L. & PRAC. 411, 413 (2004) (“[A] full performance right in sound recordings is necessary to achieve legal, economic, and artistic equality for American performers and producers both at home and abroad.”); John E. Mason, Jr., *Performers’ Rights and Copyright: The Protection of Sound Recordings from Modern Pirates,* 59 CAL. L. REV. 548, 574 (1971) (“The United States, by not recognizing a performers’ right, is behind the times and prevents its own artists from...
least thirty ultimately unsuccessful bills, which sought to extend to musical performers a general performance right in sound recordings.10

But performers can claim the royalties granted to composers simply by writing their own songs. Congress and legal scholars have failed to recognize that performers hold the power to overcome their inferior status under the Copyright Act by reinventing themselves as performer-songwriters. Indeed, many performers already have. For the most popular hits on Billboard’s year-end singles charts, the percentage of songs written or co-written by their performers has steadily increased: 7% in 1950; 22% in 1960; 50% in 1970; 60% in 1980; 64% in 1990; 68% in 2000; and 88% in 2004.11

The increase in musicians who perform their own compositions was spurred by changes that occurred in the music industry around the end of World War II. In the 1940s, a combination of market and technological developments enabled a broad swath of performers to reap royalties on their own compositions. These changes included shifts in the ways composition royalties were distributed, the expansion of the music industry, and a rise in the financial importance of the recording.12 The performer-songwriter movement took root in a cross-section of influential musicians, including Buddy Holly, Dizzy Gillespie, and Charlie Parker. Following their cue, artists such as The Beatles began to compose their own material.13 The performer-songwriter movement was originally driven by artists’ desire to obtain performance royalties on their songs’ underlying compositions and to avoid paying reproduction royalties on their albums, however, it has since cascaded into a mainstream cultural norm.

The story could end there; musical performers changed their creative practices to circumvent an ostensibly objectionable law. But this change in behavior has had more far-reaching results. This Article argues that by inducing performers to compose, the Copyright Act changed the content produced by the music industry. When performers compose their own songs, they produce music that is more politically and socially forward-leaning and diverse than the music written

being protected under foreign statutes which demand reciprocity.”); Quarterly Review of Decisions, Copyrights–Unfair Competition–Injunction to Restrain Unauthorized Use of Musical Recordings, 10 AIR L. REV. 315, 316 (1939) (“[T]he copyright law should be enlarged either by a liberal judicial construction of the Act, or by an amendment; so as to afford protection to an artist’s electrical transcription of a musical composition.”).


12. See infra Part II.

by professional songwriters. These new creative practices, in turn, have shaped our democratic civil society.

This Article asserts that the Copyright Act’s incentive structure, which led to the rise of the performer-songwriter movement, substantially contributes to the exchange of political ideals that underlies our democratic institutions, while imposing only small costs on performers. This net social gain weighs against the creation of a full public performance right for sound recordings. Part II examines how the Copyright Act’s distribution of performance royalties creates incentives for performers to compose, and it traces the statistical growth of the performer-songwriter trend. Part III discusses how emerging technologies in the 1940s created a business structure that enabled performers to earn royalties on their own compositions. It continues by outlining how the performer-songwriter movement cascaded into a mainstream norm. Part IV examines how the increase in performer-songwriters decentralized the production of content by the music industry. It also describes how the creative processes employed by performer-songwriters encourage an emotional investment in their material that often leads to artistically and socially forward-leaning content. Finally, Part V discusses the ways in which the performer-songwriter trend should inform our views on copyright legislation and concludes that Congress should repeal the grant of a digital audio transmission right.

II. COPYRIGHT FRAMEWORK

Music recordings have two copyrightable elements: 1) the underlying composition, or “musical work,” and 2) the recorded performance, or “sound recording.” For example, in John Coltrane’s recording of *My Favorite Things*, the composers Rodgers and Hammerstein are granted a copyright in the underlying musical composition. The performer, John Coltrane, is granted a copyright in the collection of musical sounds that he used to realize the underlying composition.

A. Performance Royalties

The Copyright Act grants composers the exclusive right to authorize the public performance of their songs. Pursuant to this grant,

14. See infra Part IV.
16. Id. § 102(a)(2).
17. Id. § 102(a)(7).
18. Id. § 101 (defining “sound recordings”); id. § 102(a)(7).
19. Id. § 106(4).
a composer receives royalties when his composition is performed “publicly”, defined as a performance in any “place open to the public or at any place where a substantial number of persons outside of a normal circle of a family and its social acquaintances is gathered.”

This includes the playing of recordings of the composition on radio or television, in addition to live performances in public places. Though performers have the right to control the reproduction and distribution of their sound recordings, they do not have the right to authorize most public performances and thus cannot profit from such performances.

When Coltrane’s rendition of *My Favorite Things* is played on the radio or in a public establishment, only the owner of the composition is paid a royalty.

The absence of a full performance right in the Copyright Act reflects the political clout of the broadcast industry. Simply put, the broadcasters “do not want to pay” performers. According to broadcasters, performers already receive a promotional benefit through airplay; any additional payments would represent an unwarranted handout. Some radio and television broadcasters have even “suggested, not entirely with tongue in cheek, that producers and performers should pay them” for their advertising services. According to the broadcast industry “unless it can generate more money by increasing advertising rates, it cannot afford” the proposed royalty payments to musical performers.
Even the limited rights enjoyed by performers are a relatively recent development. Before 1972, musical performers were not granted any rights at all in their recorded performances. The only element of a sound recording in which an author could enforce a copyright was the underlying composition or musical work. At that time, under a strict textual reading of the 1909 Copyright Act, a person could legally make copies of a Coltrane recording, provided that he compensated the composer of the underlying work. The Sound Recordings Act of 1971 granted performers statutory protection against duplication of their albums, but it did not create a legal entitlement to a royalty when the performers’ recordings were publicly performed. Performers who record songs written by others are also precluded from collecting the royalties they would have received if another musician were to subsequently perform works they wrote. Thus, when Coltrane recorded My Favorite Things in lieu of composing a new musical work, he denied himself two potential royalty payments: the one he would have received for the public performance of his record, and the royalty payment he would have received every time a subsequent artist performed his new song.

The Copyright Act, as currently implemented, also creates incentives for performers to compose because it provides limited protection for musical arrangements. A musician rarely records a song exactly as it was played by an earlier artist. Performers commonly rework the melody, lyrics, harmony, or orchestration. The arranging of an un-

30. In practice, however, performers were able to obtain some protection against unauthorized duplication of their works through a variety of means. See, e.g., H.R. REP. NO. 92-487, at 2 (1971), reprinted in 1971 U.S.C.C.A.N. 1566, 1567 (noting that in 1971 eight states had already “enacted statutes intended to suppress record piracy”); Note, Piracy on Records, 5 STAN. L. REV. 433, 438 (1952) (describing music executives’ “multipronged attack” against piracy); Metro. Opera Ass’n v. Wagner-Nichols Recorder Corp., 101 N.Y.S.2d 483 (N.Y. Sup. Ct. 1950) (granting creators of a sound recording a preliminary injunction against the unauthorized reproduction of phonograph records, based on state unfair competition law). However, performers still could not claim royalties when their sound recordings were publicly performed.
33. The standard Blue Moon shows the many and varied ways a song is commonly interpreted by different artists. RICHARD ROGERS & LORENZ HART, Blue Moon (MGM 1934). Compare MEL TORME, Blue Moon, on CALIFORNIA SUITE/VELVET FOG (Jasmine 1949) (a jazz interpretation), with ELVIS PRESLEY, Blue Moon, on ELVIS PRESLEY (RCA 1956) (a rock and roll interpretation), and THE MARCELS, Blue Moon, on BLUE MOON (Colpix 1961) (a doo-wop interpretation).
derlying composition is an art in itself, and it has a considerable effect on the impact of a song.  

The Copyright Act classifies “musical arrangement[s]” and adaptations of “preexisting” songs as “derivative work[s].” The Act also contains a compulsory licensing provision which allows a performer to use any non-dramatic musical composition without having to negotiate with the copyright owner for permission, provided the performer pays the statutory royalty and the musical work has been previously “distributed to the public in the United States under the authority of the copyright owner.” This allows any artist to record *My Favorite Things* without negotiating with Rodgers and Hammerstein, provided that the artist pays the fixed statutory fee. The compulsory licensing provision, however, does not automatically extend to new musical arrangements. Under the Copyright Act, a musical arrangement is not “subject to protection as a derivative work” without “the express consent of the copyright owner.” In order to enforce a performer’s copyright on his arrangement against an allegedly infringing party, a musician must first negotiate for the permission of the composer of the original work. For example, Coltrane’s recording of *My Favorite Things* features the elegant arrangement that is characteristic of his style. Under the Copyright Act, Coltrane would have to negotiate with Rodgers and Hammerstein, the composers of the original work, for permission before he could bring suit against a party that infringes his arrangement. Absent such an agreement, a subsequent performer is free to appropriate Coltrane’s manipulation of the original composition and use it on his sound recordings.

Unfortunately, obtaining permission is often not a tenable solution. Large publishers are unlikely to acquiesce to musicians’ claims to exclusive rights in arrangements of the publisher’s songs. Moreover, negotiating permission for a derivative copyright often has prohibitively high transaction costs. As one author noted, “these

---


37. The statutory royalty rate “[f]or every phonorecord made and distributed after January 1, 2006” is the larger of “either 9.1 cents, or 1.75 cents per minute of playing time or fraction thereof.” 37 C.F.R. § 255.3(m) (2007).


40. See id.


42. See id. at 295–96.
negotiations simply do not take place in the real and anonymous world of compulsory licensing.\textsuperscript{43} Little has changed since 1942, when one commentator proclaimed that “no such consent is usually obtained as a practical matter.”\textsuperscript{44}

B. Statistical Analysis of the Rise of the Performer-Songwriter

\textit{Billboard}, a leading music industry trade publication, publishes weekly rankings that are the industry standard for tracking the popularity of songs and albums. At the end of each year, \textit{Billboard} aggregates its data to create year-end standings.\textsuperscript{45} As with any ranking system, there is a degree of arbitrariness in the way \textit{Billboard} weighs the criteria in which it ranks songs.\textsuperscript{46} Indeed, over the decades, \textit{Billboard} has changed the methodology it uses for tabulating its charts.\textsuperscript{47} Despite these changes, it can be said with confidence that the charts comprise a collection of each year’s more popular songs.

As shown in Figure 1, between 1950 and 2004, the percentage of the top fifty\textsuperscript{48} songs on \textit{Billboard}’s year-end charts that were written by their performers grew steadily: 7% in 1950, 22% in 1960, 50% in 1970, 60% in 1980, 64% in 1990, 68% in 2000, and 88% in 2004.\textsuperscript{49} In an industry that increasingly expects performers to write their own material,\textsuperscript{50} the musician who uses material composed by another songwriter is becoming rarer.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{43} Id. at 295.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Comment, Protection of the Performing Artist’s “Interpretative Rendition” Through the Arranger’s Copyright, 37 U. ILL. L. REV. 245, 248 (1942).
\item \textsuperscript{45} \textit{Billboard} totals the chart details from the individual fifty-two weeks to form the “raw ingredients” of the year-end standings. \textit{The Final Chart Tallies: How They Work}, BILLBOARD, Dec. 25, 2004, at YE-16.
\item \textsuperscript{46} In 2000, the periodical’s criteria consisted of “accumulated radio and sales” and “small-market radio-playlist[s].” \textit{How We Chart The Year}, BILLBOARD, Dec. 30, 2000, at YE-36. As with many ranking systems, there is human judgment involved in the weighting of each of these criteria.
\item \textsuperscript{47} In 1950, the tallies were based on 225,000 “machine-tabulated” votes from “weekly dealer and operator reports.” \textit{The Billboard’s Fifth Annual Music-Record Recapulations}, BILLBOARD, Jan. 13, 1951, at 17.
\item \textsuperscript{48} For 1950, \textit{Billboard} listed only thirty songs on their year-end chart. \textit{The Year’s Top Tunes}, supra note 11, at 17. I have calculated the data for 1950 using the smaller sample size.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Data on file with author.
\item \textsuperscript{50} See Don Cusic, \textit{In Defense of Cover Songs}, POPULAR MUSIC & SOC’Y, May 1, 2005, at 171.
\end{itemize}
The authorship data in this study is from a database published by All Music Guide ("AMG"), a recognized content company that licenses its data to retailers, online content sites, and other companies in the entertainment media industry. AMG’s authorship data is compiled primarily from the information listed by artists on the physical product and packaging of their albums, including liner notes and album covers. This information appears to be more accurate than sheet music or copyright office filings for three reasons: composition credit and royalties are often (1) assigned for gift purposes, (2) contractually assigned, or (3) stolen outright.

The first reason that copyright office filings and sheet music are misleading is that composition credit and royalties are sometimes assigned as gifts. For example, Chano Pozo was given partial composing credit for George Russell and Dizzy Gillespie’s song *Cubana Be, Cubana Bop*. As Russell recalls, “Now, actually, Dizzy and I were..."
the writers, but when it began to get to the stage where Victor recorded it, Chano insisted that he also be listed as a composer. . . . So out of respect to Chano, we all agreed that he should be the third party. He was listed as one of the composers.\textsuperscript{55}

Secondly, formal copyright filings are misleading because composition credit is often contractually assigned to non-composers. Buddy Holly contracted away composing credit for the song \textit{That'll Be the Day} to his manager and publisher Norman Petty in exchange for producing his demo recording.\textsuperscript{56} Holly believed it to be “the price he had to pay for a shot at stardom.”\textsuperscript{57}

Third, copyright office filings are often misleading because theft of songwriting credit is common.\textsuperscript{58} As Dizzy Gillespie noted, “Somehow, the jazz businessman always became the owner and got back more than his ‘fair’ share, usually at the player’s expense. . . . They stole a lot of our music, all kinds of stuff. You’d look up and see somebody else’s name on your composition and say, ‘What’d he have to do with it?’ But you couldn’t do much about it.”\textsuperscript{59}

Given these three practices, discerning the identity of a song’s composer is often nearly impossible. While AMG’s database unquestionably contains errors, the company’s methods capitalize on industry knowledge, which appears to be more reliable than the formal copyright filings.

\textsuperscript{55} DIZZY GILLESPIE & AL FRASER, \textsc{To Be Or Not To Bop: Memoirs — Dizzy Gillespie} 324 (1979).
\textsuperscript{56} ELLIS AMBURN, \textsc{Buddy Holly: A Biography} 62 (1996).
\textsuperscript{57} Id. at 68.
\textsuperscript{58} Miles Davis’s career may provide examples of this uncomfortable business practice. Davis claims he wrote the song \textit{Donna Lee}, most commonly attributed to Charlie Parker, when he was a young musician performing as a sideman for Parker. \textit{See MILES DAVIS & QUINCY TROUPE, MILES: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY} 103–04 (1989). Later in his career, when Davis was more established, he took credit for songs widely associated with his sidemen. For example, Davis claimed that he was the sole composer of all of the songs on his album \textit{Kind of Blue}. \textit{Id} at 234. However, one of the songs on the album, \textit{Blue in Green}, is regularly attributed in jazz circles to Bill Evans, one of his sidemen on the recording. \textit{Of the 160 versions of Blue in Green in the AMG database, 79 list Bill Evans as a co-composer along with Davis, and 22 list Evans as the only composer. AMG, Blue in Green, http://allmusic.com/cg/amg.dll?p=amg&token= &sql=17:168173 (last visited Dec. 1, 2007).}

As Davis explains, “[When sidemen] were playing with me their reputations were as big as anybody’s. . . . You play with me and then you become a bandleader, because after that, everybody was saying that’s the only place to go.” \textit{DAVIS & QUINCY TROUPE, supra}, at 279. Davis would later comment, “some musicians feel sometimes I don’t give them enough credit [for their compositions]” \textit{Id. at 297. For more discussion, see GILLESPIE & FRASER, supra note 55, at 166 (alleging that Count Basie stole composition credit from Dizzy Gillespie).}

\textsuperscript{59} GILLESPIE & FRASER, \textit{supra} note 55, at 301.
III. EMERGING BUSINESS STRUCTURES

To help understand why performers did not begin to write their own material earlier, an examination of the music business’s structure is helpful. For it to be financially beneficial for performers to write their own material, a business structure first had to develop that allowed them to receive royalties for their compositions. There was no mechanism through which performers could acquire royalties on their songs until: (1) performance rights societies were compelled by court order to distribute royalties in a fashion that allowed composers not aligned with the industry powerbrokers to be paid; (2) the music industry expanded to the point where it was no longer dominated by the New York print conglomerate; and (3) the recording emerged as a viable source of royalties.

A. Equitable Distribution by Performance Rights Societies

The statutory right to control the public performance of a musical work was first given to composers in 1897. However, the right largely amounted to an empty promise due to practical difficulties with enforcement. At that time, it was “almost impossible” for an individual copyright proprietor to monitor and police the public performances of his work. For example, Rodgers and Hammerstein would have had to monitor all radio broadcasts and restaurant performances of their compositions in order to reap all of the royalties to which they were legally entitled. Likewise, it was impractical for broadcasters to negotiate for and obtain licenses from multitudes of individual copyright owners.

Beginning in 1914, composers and publishers began to join together to form performance royalty societies that licensed the public performance of their works as a collective. These societies, including the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (“ASCAP”), Broadcast Music, Inc. (“BMI”), and SESAC, Inc., primarily offer blanket licenses to users. These licenses allow users of musical works to “perform any musical composition in [the societies’]
extensive catalogue[s].”65 The fees assessed by the performance rights societies for a blanket license are usually either a flat rate or a percentage of total revenues and “do not directly depend on the amount or type of music used.”66 The performance rights societies then distribute the user license fees to the owners of the underlying musical works.67 For example, Oscar Hammerstein has registered 552 of his compositions, including the song My Favorite Things, with ASCAP.68 Broadcasters and public establishments can obtain permission to perform all of Hammerstein’s compositions, as well as any of the other songs in the ASCAP repertory, by acquiring a blanket license from the society.69 ASCAP would then distribute a portion of its income from the sales of the licenses to Oscar Hammerstein, or more correctly, to the publisher that now owns the copyrights in his compositions.70

In the 1940s, the government began regulating the way performance rights societies could distribute the user license fees the societies collected, which had the effect of empowering musical performers to collect royalties on the public performance of their own compositions.71 Prior to the 1940s, the performance rights societies’ methods of distributing royalties were “subject to the whims” of their boards of directors.72 The prevailing distribution methods were skewed to ensure that career composers, rather than those composers whose songs were performed most, were granted the lion’s share of the societies’ intake. This result occurred because the societies used payment formulas in which the number of actual performances was secondary to factors such as the longevity of membership and the availability of the musical work in the catalog.73 These methods of distribution allowed entrenched composers aligned with industry powerbrokers to essentially garner the royalties of less-established composers, whose compositions were often being performed more frequently. For example,

---

68. See ASCAP, ACE Title Search, http://www.ascap.com/ace (last visited Dec. 1, 2007). The ACE Database “contains information on all compositions in the ASCAP repertory which have appeared in any of ASCAP’s domestic surveys.” Id.
69. ASCAP, Radio License FAQs, http://www.ascap.com/licensing/radio/radiofaq.html (last visited Dec. 1, 2007). Between 1996 and 2000, the rate for a blanket license was “1.615% [of a station’s annual revenues] for stations that have annual gross revenue over $150,000 or a minimum of 1% of adjusted gross income.” Id.
70. See ASCAP, supra note 67.
73. See id.
in 1933 a member of the ASCAP directorate received $3,417 for 1,020 performances, whereas Cole Porter was only paid $1,174 for 24,476 performances. These formulas made it difficult for individual performers to obtain substantial royalties for their own compositions.

In response to this “racketeering,” the United States government brought a criminal indictment against ASCAP and a civil proceeding against BMI under the Sherman Antitrust Act. In 1941, ASCAP and BMI entered into consent decrees that allowed the government to regulate them as it would a public utilities commission. Under the consent decree, ASCAP could no longer require musicians to have more than one musical composition as a condition for membership eligibility. For the first time, all composers that registered with the performance right societies were able to collect royalties, not just composers with extensive catalogues of musical works who were associated with the major publishing houses. Furthermore, the consent decrees forbade societies from distributing the collected licensing fees on any basis other than “the number, nature, character and prestige of the copyrighted musical compositions composed, written or published by each member,” and the length of time that member had been in the society’s catalog.

The new equitable methods of revenue distribution turned performance royalties into a viable revenue stream for an expanded group of composers. After the implementation of the consent decrees, composers no longer needed to be aligned with the major publishing houses to collect royalties on their compositions.

74. Id.
79. Am. Soc’y of Composers, 1941 Trade Cas. (CCH) ¶ 56,104 at *11–12.
80. See JOHN RYAN, THE PRODUCTION OF CULTURE IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY: THE ASCAP-BMI CONTROVERSY 118 (1985) (“In 1939, there were approximately 1,100 writers and 137 publishers who shared in performance-rights income. Twenty-five years later 6,000 writers and 3,500 publishers shared in such income.”).
81. Id.
B. Industry Expansion

The second development in the 1940s that enabled musical performers to collect royalties on their own compositions was the expansion of the recording and sheet music industry. In the 1920s and 1930s, the prevailing market structure made it unprofitable for performers to write their own repertoire. The popular music industry was “dominated” by Tin Pan Alley, a powerful sheet music publishing conglomerate that George Gershwin labeled “Racket Row.” These publishers would employ song “pluggers,” described in 1930 as: “He . . . who, by all the arts of persuasion, intrigue, bribery, mayhem, malfeasance, cajolery, entreaty, threat, insinuation, persistence, and whatever else he has, sees to it that his employer’s music shall be heard.” Radio, in this era, was the principal advertising medium through which Tin Pan Alley could develop its songs into hits, and the publishing houses were willing to invest substantial sums to achieve these ends. Tin Pan Alley publishing houses would usually purchase songs outright from songwriters and then, dangling money in exchange for exposure, send advance-artist or professional copies of pre-selected songs to an influential core of executives and musicians at the commercial broadcast networks. These “hit-makers” included the producers, musical directors, and staff vocalists from the commercial network broadcasts. It was common for a major network radio bandleader during the 1930s to have as many as 10 to 14 pluggers at a performance, attempting to cajole him into performing the various publishing houses’ songs. This method of promoting songs actively created incentives for the most influential broadcast musicians to perform Tin Pan Alley repertoire rather than compose their own material; broadcast musicians had little impetus to write their own repertoire because they were compensated with bribes which could “range from

84. GOLDBERG, supra note 83, at 203 (1930).
86. NICHOLAS E. TAWA, THE WAY TO TIN PAN ALLEY: AMERICAN POPULAR SONG, 1866–1910, at 43 (1990); accord SANJEK, supra note 82, at 15.
87. See SANJEK, supra note 82, at 19–20.
88. Id. at 20.
89. See SEGRAVE, supra note 85, at 31.
cars and race horses to yachts” for performing the repertoire of Tin Pan Alley. 90

In the 1940s, the growth in the number of music-publishing firms, record companies, and radio stations, diminished the tight control Tin Pan Alley had over hit-making. The music industry became too dispersed for the print conglomerate to be able to dictate the content that artists selected for their recordings through bribery. Wesley Rose, president of Acuff-Rose Publications, recalls that by the 1940s, “the music publishing business operate[d] in all States, not just in New York and California.” 91 Independent record labels were producing fifty million records a year by 1946. 92 A “portion” of these recordings were from small firms, many of which exclusively recorded songs written by the firm’s “performers, the owner, or his assistants” in an effort to avoid paying royalties to the larger publishing houses. 93

In the 1940s and 1950s, the numerical growth of record labels was accompanied by a similar expansion in the number of independent radio stations. In 1932, there were roughly 600 broadcasting stations in the United States. 94 In 1945, the Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”) lifted its wartime freeze on radio station licensing and construction. By 1950, there were 1,517 radio stations. 95 Of these stations, 890 were not network-affiliated and often relied heavily on musical programming. 96

Songs performed by their songwriters received widespread attention on these independent stations that were outside the reach of Tin Pan Alley’s bribes. Tin Pan Alley and Hollywood publishers had “no interest” in the new market of smaller radio stations. 97 The play lists of these independent stations often focused on highly influential regional styles ranging from “hillbilly and country and western to r&b and the hybrid rock ‘n’ roll.” 98 Most importantly, these stations featured artists who composed their own music. 99 The print conglomerate

93. Id.
94. 1932 Hearings, supra note 75, at 168 (statement of Louis G. Caldwell, National Broadcasters’ Association).
95. Sanjek, supra note 82, at 34.
96. Id. at 34–35.
97. Id. at 40. During the 1940s, deejays at the smaller broadcasting operations still accepted gifts in exchange for influence over their play lists. However, these bribes were from the independent record labels, as opposed to the established publishing conglomerate. Id.
99. Beginning in the 1920s, many independent recording labels made it a “general policy” to sign exclusively artists who could write their own music or who used popular or folk songs that could be easily developed into a new composition. Sanjek, supra note 82, at 38.
was no longer able to use under-the-table payments to coax the entire radio industry into performing its material.

**C. Dominance of the Musical Recording over Sheet Music**

The third industry development in the 1940s that enabled performers to collect royalties on their own compositions was the growth in importance of the musical recording. Beginning in the 1920s, a gradual transition occurred in which sound recordings displaced sheet music as the dominant source of composition royalties in the music industry.\(^{100}\) In the 1920s and 1930s, songs were labeled “hits” based on their ability to push sheet music sales of the songs up to certain target amounts.\(^{101}\) At that time, the record industry was not fully established and only a few labels offered national distribution.\(^{102}\) The ascendancy of the sound recording in the 1940s and 1950s brought “dramatic changes” in the structure of the music industry.\(^{103}\) As musical recordings increased in popularity, and shellac became more readily available with the end of World War II,\(^{104}\) “[t]he hot medium was no longer print, as it had been when radio performers and bandleaders made the hits,” but records, supplied by the recording studios.\(^{105}\) By 1960, sheet music, once the chief revenue stream for publishers, had been completely marginalized.\(^{106}\)

The increased importance of sound recordings created a market structure in which performers no longer needed to sell their songs to print publishers to get paid for composing. By 1950, a performer or his label would be entitled to substantial royalties simply by recording the songs he had written. The new significance of the sound recording transformed composing into a considerable revenue stream for all performer-songwriters, not just the few who were well-connected within the publishing industry.

---

100. Tin Pan Alley, throughout most of its history, had received the largest percentage of its profits from the sale of sheet music. JASEN, supra note 82, at xvi. By the end of World War II, recordings accounted for more income than did the sales of sheet music. Id. at 246.
101. SANJEK, supra note 82, at 22.
103. Id.
104. JASEN, supra note 82, at 246.
105. SANJEK, supra note 82, at 40.
106. 1960 Hearings, supra note 102, at 901 (statement of Paul Ackerman, Music Editor, Billboard Magazine); cf. 2 NIMMER, supra note 35, § 8.21 n.3 (“Musical notation in the form of sheet music plays only a negligible role . . . in dollar receipts.”).
D. Spread of the Performer-Songwriter Movement: Fringe Genres

Once there was a market structure that made it profitable for performers to write their own material, the final requirement for the spread of the performer-songwriter movement was knowledge of its financial advantages. This Section explores how the performer-songwriter became part of the cultural mainstream.

In the 1940s, the burgeoning independent recording industry targeted performers in fringe genres, such as country, race music, and bebop who had the ability to compose. These labels were interested in recording artists who created their own material because the labels did not have the resources to pay royalties for the reproduction of Tin Pan Alley songs on their albums. The small recording companies operated on shoestring budgets with narrow profit margins, small sales, and limited distribution. Adequate resources for engineering, studio time, rehearsals, and composition fees were often not available. For studios operating on meager budgets, the prospect of not having to pay royalties to Tin Pan Alley for the use of its repertoire was attractive. The owners of many minor labels opened up “desk-drawer” publishing companies through which they often took songwriting credit and the associated royalties from their artists for songs the owners then published.

Bebop saxophonist Bud Johnson recollects, “I know some fellows used to run up and down [42nd Street] getting guys recording dates. Because we were all down on the Street at the time and we were making these records and everything was original.” Teddy Reig, the executive in charge of repertoire at Savoy Records recalls, “I built a very successful catalog which after thirty years has been sold for over a million and a half dollars. That was the whole legend of so-called bop, modern music. Some Dizzy, Charlie Parker, Serge Chaloff, Allen Eager, Don Byas, Lester Young.”

Many musical performers began using their leverage in the new independent recording industry to retain their copyrights and to establish their own publishing firms, instead of assigning the rights to their labels. For example, Dizzy Gillespie made a conscious effort to perform primarily repertoire in which he owned the copyright in an effort to earn more on performance royalties. As Walter Gilbert Fuller, the arranger for Gillespie’s big band, explained:

107. SANJEK, supra note 82, at 38.
109. Id.
110. SANJEK, supra note 82, at 38.
111. GILLESPIE & FRASER, supra note 55, at 298.
112. Id.
113. Telephone interview with Helene Blue, Member of Bd. of Dir., Nat’l Music Publishers’ Assoc. (June 2, 2005).
The first band, we took all of Dizzy’s records, and he and I sat down and wrote them out. My argument was, why give [the labels] the royalties off of ‘Be-bop’ when we don’t control the publishing, and give them everything, and they don’t pay you anyhow. So, let’s write something new, another melody on top of it.114

Charlie Parker’s “brilliant” and “indispensable”115 Dial recordings are another example of a musician making a conscious effort to record his own compositions to earn additional royalties.116 Charlie Parker “received both flat wages and composing royalties” for his Dial recording sessions.117 During these sessions, Parker used what at times appeared to be a “willful strategy” of recording preexisting songs with minor alterations and new titles, so that he could claim royalties as if the recordings were new compositions.118 “Desperate for heroin,” Parker then “signed half of his Dial royalties to his dealer,” Emry Byrd, nicknamed “Moose the Mooch,” under a written agreement that was later typed and notarized.119 In the agreement, Parker conveyed a number of songs that have become standard repertoire in the jazz cannon, including Confirmation, Moose the Mooch (named after the aforementioned drug dealer), Yardbird Suite, and Ornithology.120

For some musicians, the motivation to compose was influenced by socio-political considerations as well as economic concerns. As musicologist James Patrick notes, the decision by artists to compose “involve[d] a complex interaction between ideological issues of artist self-identification, race-consciousness, and exploitation.”121 Drummer and jazz luminary Max Roach recalled:

When we got downtown, [white audiences] wanted to hear something they were familiar with, like ‘How
High the Moon,’ ‘What Is This Thing Called Love?’ Can you play that? So in playing these things, the black musicians recognized that the royalties were going back to these people, like ASCAP, the Jerome Kerns, the Gershwins. So one revolutionary thing that happened, they began to write parodies on the harmonic structures.122

For Roach the decision to perform new compositions based on existing songs was linked to a desire to avoid paying royalties to the primarily white establishment of professional songwriters.

The spread of the performer-songwriter movement was thus spearheaded by both independent record labels and the artists themselves. At the core of the trend was a desire to avoid paying royalties to Tin Pan Alley for the reproduction of Tin Pan Alley’s songs on its albums, and the desire to earn performance royalties on their own compositions.

E. Spread of the Performer-Songwriter Movement: Mainstream Popular Culture

The next question is: how did the performer-songwriter movement grow from a small fringe behavior into a large shift in industry behavior?123 Social science research suggests that informational cascades may be behind this phenomenon. An informational cascade occurs when a person copies the behavior of earlier actors without evaluating on an individual basis whether the behavior is necessarily in his best interest.124 Stated bluntly, “[i]f an experienced individual acts first, others frequently imitate.”125 Research on informational cascades has shown that experienced individuals can have a disproportionate effect on cultural trends.126

Performance practices in the music industry appear especially susceptible to informational cascades. Musicians often learn their trade by imitating the creative practices of high-profile performers without fully examining all of the underlying artistic or economic factors of those practices. For many young musicians, the practice of memorizing and imitating others’ recording practices is “almost a rite

122. Gillespie & Fraser, supra note 55, at 209.
124. Id. at 994.
125. Id. at 1002.
126. Id. at 1002–03.
of passage.”127 This tendency to emulate meant that only a small cross-section of influential musicians had to learn the financial advantages of composing for the performer-songwriter movement to flourish. Mainstream artists then adopted the practice of composing in imitation of these fringe musicians. By changing the creative practices of an influential fringe group, copyright law affected the behavior of performers who had little knowledge of the existing financial incentives.

Buddy Holly, and the influence he had on other musicians, provides an example of how copyright law can cause an informational cascade. Holly developed as a young musician in a fringe genre, country music, in which a premium was placed on performers who wrote their own repertoire.128 Buddy Holly’s writing career was “galvanized” by the prospect of a recording contract.129 Holly wrote his first four original songs on a demo album at the request of his business manager in order to attract interest from Nashville record labels.130 Holly’s writing career was thus spurred by the Copyright Act’s incentive structure and an attempt to make himself more marketable. Shortly before his death, Holly considered refocusing his career exclusively on songwriting and producing, so that he could earn a living without suffering the demands of touring.131

The Beatles, in contrast, began composing in imitation of the musical practices of Holly and were not, at least initially, seeking royalties.132 As Paul McCartney commented, “John [Lennon] and I started to write because of Buddy Holly. It was like, ‘Wow! He writes and is a musician.’”133 The Beatles were “attracted” to the “fact that there was always ‘Holly/Petty’ or ‘Petty/Holly’ on the records, so [they] knew he was one of the writers.”134 When McCartney began writing, he was likely unaware of, or ambivalent, to the financial benefits of composing.135 As the publisher Helene Blue says, “Money is not the goal. But it all leads to money.”136

128. SANJEK, supra note 82, at 38.
129. AMBURN, supra note 56, at 39.
130. Id.
131. Id.
132. See Telephone interview with Helene Blue, supra note 113.
133. THE BEATLES ANTHOLOGY, supra note 13, at 22. As a British ensemble, The Beatles provide an intriguing example of the far-reaching impact of American copyright law. Performance practices reach across borders.
134. Id. Peggy Sue is an example of how a copyright filing may not always accurately reflect who should receive composition credit. See AMBURN, supra note 56, at 79 (suggesting that Holly’s manager, Norman Petty, received songwriting credit for a song that Holly and Jerry Allison wrote).
135. Telephone interview with Helene Blue, supra note 113.
136. Id.
The Beatles, influenced by Buddy Holly’s composition practices, in turn popularized the concept of the performer-songwriter and cemented its place in American pop culture. McCartney recalled, “One of the main things about The Beatles is that we started out writing our own material. People these days take it for granted that you do, but nobody used to then.”\textsuperscript{137} For example, suppose your daughter starts a garage band and decides to write the songs that the band will perform. She probably does not understand copyright law. Even if she does, her band probably does not sell records, so her decision to compose cannot be financially motivated. When your daughter chooses to write her own songs, she is therefore likely imitating the practices of influential musicians.

Copyright’s influence is thus not limited to professional musicians. By influencing the creative practices of role model performers such as Charlie Parker, Buddy Holly, and The Beatles, the entitlements created by copyright law can affect the behavior of non-professional and recreational musicians, who represent a more diverse cross-section of the musical community. Copyright has defined the broader structure of the music industry by changing the practices of a smaller subset of influential fringe performers.

\section*{IV. \textbf{Cultural Impact}}

This Section examines the effect of the performer-songwriter trend on the structure and content of the music industry and discusses its larger cultural impact.

\paragraph*{A. Increase in the Number of Songwriters}

The Copyright Act’s denial of a full performance right led to a steady increase in the number of songwriters.\textsuperscript{138} As a result, composing is no longer the exclusive dominion of a select group of professional New York writers. It has become commonplace.

Some publishers and music critics question the benefits of the performer-songwriter trend. According to those critics, the increased prevalence of albums comprised solely of new compositions has lowered the average quality of the individual songs.\textsuperscript{139} As publisher Helene Blue explains, “The Beatles had the talent [to write an album comprised solely of originals]. We no longer care if the artists have the talent. This is why we don’t have albums with twelve great songs. We have albums with one or two good songs.”\textsuperscript{140} In Ms. Blue’s opin-
ion, one of the results of the increased number of performers who write their own compositions is a corresponding increase in the abundance of “[a]lbums with “weak ‘B’ sides.”

The publishing community’s negative opinions about performer-songwriting must be viewed in context, however. The performer-songwriter movement undercut the vitality of the publishing industry. Publishers, who were the kings of the American music business for over a century, became secondary to record labels and the performers with whom the publishers associated. As Martin Cane, the President of Famous Music Corporation, commented in the trade magazine Record World: “For a while, the publishing marketplace didn’t know what happened. An abundance of talented writers, professional people, and publishers were caught unexpectedly by this new trend and really had no place to turn.”

There are also three possible responses to the claim that the performer-songwriter movement has resulted in lower quality songs. First, publishers and music critics may have an idealized view of past musical eras. For every enduring masterpiece, such as Washington and Young’s My Foolish Heart, there was a soon-forgotten novelty hit, like Merrill’s composition If I Knew You Were Comin’ I’d’ve Baked a Cake. There has always been a mixture of enduringly brilliant and fleetingly popular songs on the Billboard singles charts. Some publishers and music critics tend to judge past eras based only on the works of genius that survive, while forgetting the less-notable works that have faded.

Second, professional songwriters are not always the most skilled at their trade. For songs to be sold for use by a third party — as is the case when a label buys music for a performer — the song usually must be distilled into sheet music. Thus, musicians who are brilliant songwriters, but not musically literate, are largely barred from this

141. Id. When Ms. Blue mentions “B” sides, she is referring to the second side of musical tapes and records.


[The music publishing industry’s] function today is heavily administrative and clerical. They are largely service entities, conduits for the processing of income and paper transactions. They do not promote as they used to. They do not advertise as they used to. They do not create demand as they used to. They do not employ field representatives as they used to. These promotional functions necessarily have been taken over by the recording companies.

143. PAULA DRANOV, INSIDE THE MUSIC PUBLISHING INDUSTRY 23 (1980).

144. My Foolish Heart reached number twenty-two on the Billboard charts, while If I Knew You Were Coming, I’d’ve Baked a Cake reached number eleven. See The Year’s Top Tunes, supra note 11, at 17.
profession. In contrast, a musician who performs his or her own compositions does not have to write out the songs in musical notation. The denial of a full performance right has pushed record labels to discover such influential writers as Jimi Hendrix, Buddy Holly, Paul McCartney, and Hank Williams, even though those writers were never musically literate according to the standards of professional songwriters. As Miles Davis commented, “[t]here are a lot of great musicians who don’t read music — black and white — that I have known and respected and played with.” The Copyright Act created incentives for labels to forsake Tin Pan Alley’s established process and record artists’ innovative compositions.

Finally, even if one accepts the argument that the increased number of songs has generally lowered album quality, the performer-songwriter trend is not necessarily adverse to the development of American popular music. The increased popularity of songwriting, even if much of it is done by mediocre writers, may nevertheless lead to a net increase in the variety of musical works available and the opinions expressed in those songs. Like the American federal system, for which it is often said that “the 50 States serve as laboratories for the development of new social, economic, and political ideas,” the exponential increase in the number of writers has created countless musical sub-genres, which serve as laboratories for development and exploration outside of the mainstream industry. The growth in the number of composers has decentralized the content produced by the music industry.

Others have also posited a connection between mediocre performer-written music and the “downloading problem.” As Ms. Blue explains, “[n]o one wants to buy an album, because only one or two songs are valuable.” In her view, consumers are motivated to illegally download songs because they do not want to pay for a complete

---

145. See, e.g., SHEPHERD, supra note 90, at 28–29 (describing the barriers faced by black ragtime pianists who could not read or write sheet music).
146. See Charles Cronin, Virtual Music Scores, Copyright and the Promotion of a Marginalized Technology, 28 COLUM. J.L. & ARTS 1, 8–9 (2004).
147. See DAVIS & QUINCY TROUPE, supra note 58, at 292 (observing that Jimi Hendrix could not read the sheet music Miles Davis had given him); AMBURN, supra note 56, at 138 (noting that none of the members of Buddy Holly’s band could read music); THE BEATLES ANTHOLOGY, supra note 13, at 19; COLIN ESCOTT, GEORGE MERITT & WILLIAM MACEWEN, THE BIOGRAPHY 36 (1994) (reporting that Hank Williams would sell song portfolios at his concert that contained “only the words . . . not the music” because he “didn’t know musical notation and wasn’t about to pay somebody to transcribe for him”).
148. DAVIS & QUINCY TROUPE, supra note 58, at 292.
149. Fed. Energy Regulatory Comm’n v. Mississippi, 456 U.S. 742, 788 (1982) (O’Connor, J., concurring in part); see also New State Ice Co. v. Liebmann, 285 U.S. 262, 311 (1932) (Brandeis, J., dissenting). (“It is one of the happy incidents of the federal system that a single courageous State may, if its citizens choose, serve as a laboratory; and try novel social and economic experiments without risk to the rest of the country.”).
150. Telephone interview with Helene Blue, supra note 113.
151. Id.
album when there are only a few listenable songs. To the extent that performer-songwriters are blamed for illegal downloading, they also must receive credit for the “booming demand” for music on the Internet that has led to steep increases in legitimate online music sales. Digital music sales more than tripled between the first half of 2004 and 2005. The digital music market has surpassed the value of the global singles market.

B. Differences in Composition Processes

Music composed by a performer-songwriter is substantively different from music composed by a professional songwriter for two reasons. First, performers who write their own music often feel a strong personal connection to their works. Vocalist Sachal Vasandani estimates that “nine times out of ten” he is more attached to songs that he composes than those written by others. Vasandani relates:

In the beginning, when you have a song that you have written, you want to nurture it like it is your own child. Other pieces of music are other people’s children. But when you have a song that you have written, you want to care for it like it is your own.

Guitarist Jeff Libman notes that while it depends on the individual composition, “[s]ome of the songs you write you really love.” Of course, songs written by other composers can also become “intensely personal.” As Libman explains, “[s]ome of the music that other people have written becomes so dear to me and is such a part of my life that it reaches the level of the favorite music that I’ve written.” But there appears to be an immediacy to artists’ attachment to their own repertoire that is lacking when they perform songs written by other people. Says Libman, “[b]y the time you complete a piece of your own music . . . [y]ou may have never heard it performed, and

152. Id.
154. See id.
155. Id.
156. Telephone Interview with Jeff Libman, Adjunct Professor of Music, Phoenix College (Jan. 14, 2007).
158. Id.
159. Telephone Interview with Jeff Libman, supra note 156.
160. Id.
161. Id.
you already love it, whereas a lot of the music that you didn’t write has to grow on you.\footnote{162}

Some performers appear to be burdened by their attachment to their own compositions. Libman comments that when she writes her own songs, her “goal” is to produce a “masterwork” that compares to the “great music [she] listened to growing up.”\footnote{163} Drummer Andy Beaudoin states, “I’m so critical when I bring in my own music that I can be overly self-conscious; in that sense I feel closer to it.”\footnote{164}

Agreeing that he also certainly has more of a connection with his own songs, but is “overly critical” of such songs, saxophonist Ben Bokor explains, “I have a narrow way I expect my own [compositions] to sound . . . . [W]ith other people’s stuff I have a much wider view . . . .”\footnote{165}

A performer’s personal attachment to material he wrote also encourages compositions that are socially and artistically progressive. Beaudoin observes that at the root of the motivation to compose a song “is an attempt to do something new and original. The action alone can be more controversial than playing a song just because it’s popular and has been around.”\footnote{166} Vasandani agrees stating, “The lyrics you write mean a whole hell of a lot to you . . . . With every song that I write I’m trying to deal with something substantive and not just skimming the top.”\footnote{167} Bokor finds that his compositions tend to be socially and artistically progressive especially when he writes “something that’s meant to be programmatic” for an “event, activity, or person.”\footnote{168}

The second reason why music composed by a performer-songwriter is substantively different from music composed by professional composers is that performer-songwriter compositions are marketed to a different audience. The professional songwriter’s primary audience, at least initially, is the industry executive, who is often searching for material that is representative of what is currently successful. This top-down process of repertoire selection encourages conservatism. Recording executives, who are trying to appeal to the broadest possible audience, will often shy away from novel or unorthodox material. For example, in the early 1960s, music publishers steered popular singers towards “more innocuous general songs” and away from “damning direct statements.”\footnote{169} In that era of social up-

\footnote{162. Id.}
\footnote{163. Id.}
\footnote{164. Telephone Interview with Andy Beaudoin, Adjunct Professor of Music, Cy-Fair College (Jan. 14, 2007).}
\footnote{165. Telephone Interview with Ben Bokor, Freelance Musician (Jan. 14, 2007).}
\footnote{166. Telephone Interview with Andy Beaudoin, supra note 164.}
\footnote{167. Telephone Interview with Sachal Vasandani, supra note 157.}
\footnote{168. Telephone Interview with Ben Bokor, supra note 165.}
\footnote{169. JOSH DUNSON, FREEDOM IN THE AIR: SONG MOVEMENTS OF THE SIXTIES 79 (1965).}
heaval, publishers pushed for material that “contained enough protest to catch what was in the air, but not enough to start any winds blowing.”\textsuperscript{170} When composing, a performer-songwriter appears to be driven largely by his own standards, with the twin goals of self-satisfaction and financial reward. As Libman comments, “[p]eople who write don’t only try to satisfy others. They try to satisfy themselves first.”\textsuperscript{171}

\textit{C. Politically and Socially Forward-Leaning Content: Historical Analysis}

The performer-songwriter’s historical role in American counter-culture showcases the difference between the composition process of a performer writing for himself and that of a professional songwriter writing songs for sale to industry executives. One of the first examples of the pronounced contrast in creative practices between musicians who performed their own compositions and those who performed works written by professional composers occurred during the Great Depression. During the 1930s, Tin Pan Alley popular music songs tended to “scrupulously avoid any mention of social problems.”\textsuperscript{172} Indeed, “while Tin Pan Alley and Hollywood provided vivid fantasies of life among the elite,”\textsuperscript{173} early country and blues performer-songwriters “chronicled the suffering of the homeless and unemployed: the Dust Bowl farmers whose way of life was threatened by ecological, as well as economic disaster; and the textile and mine workers of the South, whose attempts to unionize were resisted — sometimes violently — by big business.”\textsuperscript{174}

By the mid-to-late 1960s, the ever-growing performer-songwriter movement had enabled music to become a “centrally significant medium for the dissemination of a range of socio-political issues, from U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War to the Civil Rights Movement, to the rejection of western political and cultural ideology.”\textsuperscript{175} Popular music contributed to the development of a new political consciousness.\textsuperscript{176} Performer-songwriters helped to “sustain a countercultural

\textsuperscript{170} Id.
\textsuperscript{171} Telephone Interview with Jeff Libman, supra note 156.
\textsuperscript{172} DUNSON, supra note 169, at 118.
\textsuperscript{173} Id.
\textsuperscript{174} Id. at 118–19. Examples of songs by performer-songwriters that dealt with the Depression include early country star Uncle David Macon’s \textit{All in Down and Out Blues}, which argued that “Wall Street’s propositions were not all roses,” and Casey Bill Weldon’s \textit{WPA Blues}, which described a government demolition crew destroying dilapidated housing still occupied by African American families. Id.
\textsuperscript{175} ANDY BENNETT, \textit{CULTURES OF POPULAR MUSIC} 29 (2001).
and political movement associated with drug experimentation, generational rebellion, and opposition to the Vietnam War.\textsuperscript{177} These cultural giants, ranging from The Beatles and Bob Dylan to Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin, contributed to the political movement with songs that were often “heavily weighted” with political and social messages.\textsuperscript{178} During this period, political and social ideas were disseminated through popular music written by performer-songwriters; in turn, the prevailing political movements influenced the content of popular music.\textsuperscript{179}

Lastly, no discussion of performer-songwriters and their often politically-orientated messages would be complete without addressing rap music. This performer-written genre’s lyrics have been described as “deeply political” in both “content” and “spirit”\textsuperscript{180} and have been credited with having a “profound impact on the African American community in the United States.”\textsuperscript{181} Indeed, rap has been said to “negotiate the experiences of marginalization, brutally truncated opportunity, and oppression within the cultural imperatives of African-American and Caribbean history, identity, and community.”\textsuperscript{182}

The historical legacy of performer-songwriters is marked by music with a greater tendency to raise issues that are often controversial when compared to music composed by professional songwriters. From the Great Depression to the new millennium, performer-songwriters have played a central role in drawing attention to social and political issues and have affected democratic discussion in our civil society.

\section*{D. Politically and Socially Forward-Leaning Content: Empirical Analysis}

There are limitations, of course, of looking to history to compare the impact of songs written by performer-songwriters and those written by professional writers. Prevailing opinions on musical trends are colored both by people’s subjective tastes and by the passage of time. However, empirical analysis of the lengths of songs created using the two different composing practices provides evidence that suggests the two practices produce music that is inherently different.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{177} Mark Mattern, Acting in Concert: Music, Community, and Political Action 16 (1998).
\item \textsuperscript{178} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{179} See Eyerman & Jamison, supra note 176, at 108.
\item \textsuperscript{180} Tricia Rose, “Fear of a Black Planet”: Rap Music and Black Cultural Politics in the 1990s, 60 J. NEGRO EDUC. 276, 289 (1991).
\item \textsuperscript{181} Errol A. Henderson, Black Nationalism and Rap Music, 26 J. BLACK STUD. 308, 310 (1996).
\item \textsuperscript{182} Tricia Rose, Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America 21 (1994).
\end{itemize}
As shown in Figure 2, for the most popular songs on *Billboard* Magazine’s year end charts, songs composed by their performers average 245.1 seconds in length while those written by a second party average 204.6 seconds, a difference of 40.5 seconds. An analysis of variance (“ANOVA”) shows that the difference in average song length is statistically significant.\(^{183}\)

\[\text{Figure 2: Average Song Length}\]

As Figure 3 demonstrates, a year-by-year comparison of the song lengths for the two categories shows that, with the exception of 1950, the average length of music written by a performer-songwriter on the year-end charts is always longer: 161.5 compared to 154.0 seconds in 1960; 227.5 seconds compared to 206.0 seconds in 1970; 252.0 seconds compared to 244.5 seconds in 1980; 288.6 seconds compared to 272.5 seconds in 1990; 248.8 seconds compared to 237.7 seconds in 2000; and 241.3 seconds compared to 217.5 seconds in 2004.\(^{184}\) The data for 1950 are not dispositive because of the small sample size; only 2 of 30 songs were composed by performer-songwriters.\(^{185}\) Songs written by performer-songwriters were consistently longer than those written by songwriters for sale in every other test interval.

---

\(^{183}\) The ANOVA p-value is less than .0001. Statistical analysis and interpretation assisted by Sunil Sen, an actuary.

\(^{184}\) Data on file with author.

\(^{185}\) See id.
Determining the length of a song on the *Billboard* charts presents a unique challenge. There are often scores of releases featuring an artist performing a particular composition. For example, there are twenty-seven different versions of Frank Sinatra singing *Fly Me To The Moon* in the AMG database. Selecting the version that corresponds with the *Billboard* listing is impossible. Labels often make multiple releases for a song climbing the charts in the form of a second printing or regional release. In these situations, there is no one length for the “original” song on the *Billboard* charts. This study mitigated the problem of having to decide which release of a song to use in the computations by consistently using the data from the earliest recording, or first listing in the AMG database. This provided a consistent point of selection so that human bias would not factor into the data. Furthermore, the earliest release is more likely to reflect the “original” recording that was on the *Billboard* charts.

The empirical analysis of the length of songs shows a consistent difference between compositions written by a performer-songwriter and those written by a second party, but it does little to immediately suggest the reasons for the results. One intuitive explanation is that a musician who is invested in his or her repertoire may produce songs that are longer. Though it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about

---

186. AMG, Frank Sinatra: *Fly Me to the Moon*, [http://www.allmusic.com/cg/amg.dll?p=amg&token=&sql=33:0v6f6b49kl5x](http://www.allmusic.com/cg/amg.dll?p=amg&token=&sql=33:0v6f6b49kl5x) (last visited Dec. 1, 2007). If the different releases are of from the same recording date, the disparity between the lengths of the releases is marginal. For example, the recording of Sinatra singing *Fly Me to the Moon* with the Count Basie Orchestra was released on both the album *Sinatra at the Sands*, and on a compilation album for the label DJ Specialist. See FRANK SINATRA, *Fly Me to the Moon*, on *SINATRA AT THE SANDS* (Warner Bros. Records 1966); FRANK SINATRA, *Fly Me to the Moon, on MY WAY: THE BEST OF FRANK SINATRA* (DJ Specialist 1997). In the Warner Brothers release, *Fly Me to the Moon* is listed at 2:30. The same recording is listed at 2:29 in the DJ Specialist version.

187. The study had one uniform exception: if the first listing in the AMG database was labeled a “re-mix” in the song title, the study used the data from the second listing.
the relationship between a song’s authorship and its length, there are examples that might suggest a correlation between authorship and content. Across genres, some of the most forward-leaning musical compositions are also among the longest.\textsuperscript{188}

\section*{V. Legislative Implications}

This Section describes how the performer-songwriter movement should push the copyright community to re-evaluate its criticism of the lack of a general performance right in recordings. This segment ends with a discussion of why Congress should revoke the Copyright Act’s grant of a limited digital audio transmission right.

\subsection*{A. Efficiency and Fairness}

When legislators and scholars advocate the establishment of a full public performance right, they usually rely on two types of arguments: equity-based and incentive-based.\textsuperscript{189} Equity arguments are usually comparative. If performers contribute more to the success of a musical recording than composers, then performers should be compensated at least as much as the composers.\textsuperscript{190} Equity arguments state that a performer’s interpretation is “no less a contribution to, or an integral part of, the recorded product that is the composer’s score and lyrics.”\textsuperscript{191} In this view, a full performance right is consistent with the fact that it is the performer who “brings the composer’s work to life” and is ultimately responsible for whether the recording is artistically and commercially successful.\textsuperscript{192} Thus, under an equity argument, by granting only the composer the right to profit from the public performance of his compositions, the Copyright Act fails to adequately reward per-

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[{188}] See, e.g., \textsc{Sir George Solti \& Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Mahler: Symphony No. 8 “Symphony of a Thousand”} (Decca 1972) (classical music from the romantic era, timed at 1:33:35); \textsc{Arlo Guthrie, Alice’s Restaurant Massacre, on Alice’s Restaurant} (Reprise 1967) (folk, timed at 18:20); \textsc{John Coltrane, Ascension (I), on Ascension} (Impulse! 1965) (jazz, timed at 40:56); \textsc{Grandmaster Flash \& the Furious Five, The Message, on The Message} (Sugar Hill Records 1982) (hip-hop, timed at 7:12).
\item[{190}] See id. at 193; cf. Capitol Records, Inc. v. Mercury Records Corp., 221 F.2d 657, 664 (2d Cir. 1955) (Hand, J., dissenting) (“[I]n the vast number of renditions, the performer has a wide choice, depending upon his gifts, and this makes his rendition pro tanto quite as original a ‘composition’ as an ‘arrangement’ or ‘adaptation’ of the score itself . . . .”).
\item[{192}] Waxman, \textit{supra} note 24, at 42.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
formers for their creative contributions. Performers deserve a proportional reward for their creative efforts.

Incentive arguments are rooted in copyright law’s constitutional directive to “promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts.”193 Incentive arguments are premised on the proposition that “copyright was not designed ‘primarily’ to ‘benefit’ the ‘author’,”194 instead, copyright’s “sole interest” and “primary object” are to benefit the public.195 According to this view, by denying a full performance right, Congress may have failed to strike the “necessary balance” between granting authors monetary incentives and providing the public with access to the authors’ works.196 Without performers to convey the compositions of songwriters, the public has only limited access to those creations. Performers’ significant role, combined with the stated purpose of copyright, suggests that granting performers a public performance right would be one way to ensure greater public access to musical works. Arguably, when copyright law inadequately rewards performers for their contributions, it fails to provide the optimal degree of incentive.

While incentive and equity arguments have intrinsic appeal, many musical performers are able to collect performance royalties by composing their own songs. The ability to obtain those royalties undermines the claim that copyright policy is blatantly unfair or inefficient with respect to performers when performers can write non-infringing new compositions.

Of course, the burden of songwriting is hardly trivial for musicians who are unable to compose. Musicians who cannot write original works that they would be willing to perform are certainly disadvantaged by the denial of a full performance right. In order to reap royalties on the public performance of albums by performance-only artists, a record label would have to acquire the copyright in the songs recorded by the artists, making the production of their albums less attractive because of the higher costs and inconvenience.197

However, the denial of a public performance right does not completely deny non-composing musicians the ability to earn a living. For most professional performers, recording and publishing royalties are not the primary sources of income. Instead, most professional musicians have to “commit themselves” to earning the majority of their

195. Fox Film Corp. v. Doyal, 286 U.S. 123, 127 (1932).
197. “Most labels” will only show an “interest” if a performer is “listed as a writer or co-writer.” Cusic, supra note 50, at 171.
income though live performances and teaching. In 1977, the United States Copyright Office prepared a report providing evidence of the insignificant financial benefit of copyright royalties for non-star professional musicians. Among members of the American Federation of Musicians, the preeminent union for musicians in the record industry, only 23% received royalties from any of their sound recordings. Of this 23%, 41% stated that sound recordings royalties comprised 2% to 5% of their income, and 35% indicated that the royalties were 1% or less. These statistics suggest that for most artists who do not compose, the lack of the right to profit from the public performance of their albums may not be a large burden.

Furthermore, the harm from the denial of a performance right for the “small percentage” of musicians who do earn a “substantial” amount of money from recordings is generally mitigated. These musicians, who are the most successful artists in the industry, are likely to be in a financial position to acquire their own catalog. In practice, the denial of a public performance right only has a marginally direct effect on most professional musicians.

**B. Copyright as a Means to Facilitate Democratic Civil Society**

Of course, it does not necessarily follow that the denial of a full performance right is good policy solely because the equity- and incentive-based arguments in favor of such a right are not as strong as many would contend. The benefits associated with decentralizing the production of content must outweigh the burden imposed by the policy. This evaluation forces the difficult appraisal of the non-monetary benefits of performer-composed content.

Professor Neil Weinstock Netanel argues that “copyright’s primary goal is not allocative efficiency, but the support of a democratic culture.” In this view, copyright has two “democracy-enhancing functions.” First, copyright provides an incentive for creative expression on “political, social, and aesthetic issues.” Second, copyright supports a “sector of creative and communicative activity that is relatively free from reliance on state subsidy, elite patronage, and cul-

---

198. Telephone interview with Jeff Libman, Adjunct Professor of Music, Phoenix College (Nov. 9, 2007).
200. 1978 REPORT, supra note 26, at 117.
201. Id. at 118.
202. Telephone interview with Jeff Libman, supra note 198.
203. Id.
205. Id.
206. Id. at 347.
Accordingly, copyright should be viewed as “a state measure designed to enhance the independent and pluralist character of civil society.” This interpretation is further supported by the framers of the first copyright statute, who proclaimed that “[l]iterature and [s]cience are essential to the preservation of a free Constitution . . . .”

If one accepts the analysis that democratic culture is the primary goal of copyright law, then it becomes easier to justify the lack of a full performance right. The denial of a full performance right in sound recordings benefits democracy by decentralizing the music production process, which leads to the creation of more culturally significant compositions. Even if one does not accept that supporting a democratic culture is the primary goal of copyright, the benefits to democracy outweigh the equity- and incentive-based concerns outlined above.

C. The Limited Digital Audio Transmission Right

By 1995, there were “a small number of services” that offered digital transmissions of musical recordings to subscribers on the Internet. The recording industry became concerned that these new interactive services would undermine its business model because it feared that consumers would not purchase traditional records if consumers could get the same music on-demand through a digital service. The industry feared that if a listener could request Coltrane’s recording of My Favorite Things whenever he wanted, it would eliminate the desire to purchase a hard-copy of the album.

The advent of digital music transmission increased the importance of performance rights and drew attention to the disparity in the royalties received by performers who wrote their material and those who did not. Before this technological development, performers and their labels received money when their physical records were purchased, even if the performers were not granted a public performance right. With digital downloading, the public can gain on-demand access to a performer’s material without having to purchase a hardcopy. Because these digital transmissions were considered legally equivalent to a public performance rather than to the purchase of a physical album, performers who did not compose their own songs were left entirely uncompensated. The development of digital technology es-

207. Id. at 288.
208. Id. at 291.
209. 1 ANNALS OF CONG. 972 (Joseph Gales ed., 1820); see Netanel, supra note 204, at 289 n.17.
211. See id. at 13.
sententially created a loophole allowing consumers to purchase songs without paying any money to those performers who do not compose their own songs.

In response to this technological change and at the urging of the record industry, Congress granted a “narrowly crafted” performance right to the owners of sound recordings to ensure that they would be able to profit from the use of their albums in the new digital medium.\footnote{212. H.R. REP. NO. 104-274, at 13 (1995); see Digital Performance Right in Sound Recordings Act of 1995, Pub. L. No. 104-39, 109 Stat. 336, amended by Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998, Pub. L. No. 105-304, § 405(a)(6), 112 Stat. 2860.} The digital transmission right “is riddled with exceptions and benefits reflecting compromises worked out among the competing interests.”\footnote{213. 2 NIMMER, supra note 35, §§ 8.21–.22.} The right is limited to:

(1) transmissions, as opposed to live performances (thereby exempting concerts, restaurants, dances, amusement parks, etc.); (2) of audio works, as opposed to audiovisual works (thereby exempting transmissions of movies); (3) that occur in digital format, as opposed to analog (thereby exempting contemporaneous AM and FM radio stations, and contemporaneous TV stations as well).\footnote{214. Id. § 8.21.}

In 2005, the main services affected by the digital transmission right included satellite radio services XM and Sirius; webcasters like AOL, Live 365, and Yahoo!; and digital cable and satellite television music services like Music Choice, DMX, and Muzak.\footnote{215. SOUNDEXCHANGE, PERFORMANCE ROYALTIES FOR RECORDING ARTISTS AND RECORD LABELS: AN INTRODUCTION TO SOUNDEXCHANGE 2 (2005) (on file with author).}

At that time, the royalties from digital audio transmissions were still inconsequential compared to the royalties derived from traditional performing rights societies. SoundExchange is the lone organization that collects and distributes performance royalties from digital audio transmissions of sound recordings.\footnote{216. Id.} Its income is “still tiny compared with the royalties paid from traditional radio . . . but it is growing fast.”\footnote{217. Ben Sisario, Old Songs Generate New Cash for Artists, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 28, 2004, at E1.} Between October 2004 and October 2005, the weekday average audiences increased 177% for the three largest digital radio providers.\footnote{218. Press Release, Arbitron Inc., First Full Year of comScore Arbitron Online Radio Ratings Shows a 177% Increase in Weekday Average Quarter Hour Audience for Measured Networks (Oct. 2005), available at http://www.arbitron.com/onlineradio/topranked.htm.} One music industry economist predicted that the revenue from satellite radio would increase to six to ten times the current re-
venue over the next five years. It seems fair to conclude that the digital transmission right is rapidly becoming a substantial source of revenue.

D. The Argument for Repealing the Limited Digital Audio Transmission Right

If we accept that the primary purpose of copyright is to support our democratic civil society, then there are ample reasons to revoke the digital transmission right granted in 1995. The denial of a general performance right in sound recordings has created incentives for performers to compose. Those creative practices, in turn, have turned popular music into a driving force behind the “free trade in ideas” that forms the foundation of our democracy. When a performer writes his own songs, he is more likely to form the personal attachment that often leads him to create material that addresses social issues. As a result, performer-songwriters have historically played an integral role in facilitating communal discussion on such issues as the Great Depression, the Vietnam War, and race relations.

There is no reason for Congress to differentiate between the rights accorded to sound recordings in the digital and traditional marketplaces. Through songwriting, performers have developed an artistic practice that allows them to reap performance royalties on their compositions. The growth in the prevalence of digital media may increase the disparity in rewards an artist will receive if he performs another’s material. But the recording industry would not be paralyzed by the revocation of the limited performance right and the growth of digital technology. The repeal of a general performance right in sound recordings would create a net societal gain by facilitating our democratic civil society while only marginal affecting the income of most professional musicians and the functioning of the recording industry.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Introduction to this Article used John Coltrane’s first recording of the song My Favorite Things to illustrate how performers are, seemingly unjustly, denied a royalty when their sound recordings are played in public. Some might even argue that Coltrane contributed more to the recording of My Favorite Things than the songwriters, Rodgers and Hammerstein; yet, he is still not granted compensation

219. Sisario, supra note 217.
220. See generally Netanel, supra note 204, at 288.
when his rendition is publicly performed. Under the Copyright Act, only the composers of a musical composition are granted a royalty when a sound recording is played on television, radio, or in a public venue.

John Coltrane’s recording of *My Favorite Things* is arguably a high point of 20th-century music. But Coltrane’s pioneering rendition, for all of its brilliance, is not widely considered his masterpiece. That designation is most often reserved for his self-composed album, *A Love Supreme*, a “musical self-portrait” that details his “spiritual reawakening following his struggle with drug addiction.” It was Coltrane’s own compositions on *A Love Supreme* that provided a vehicle for the expression of his spiritual and religious ideas. Likewise, Coltrane’s most politically forward-leaning performances were also the product of his own quill. His song *Alabama* is a riveting elegy for the victims of the infamous 1963 Sunday morning church bombing in Birmingham. It features a melody that is patterned off of the cadence of Martin Luther King’s funeral oration. *Alabama* has been called Coltrane’s “most overtly political composition” and one of “jazz’s most enduring calls for change.”

If *A Love Supreme* and *Alabama* are any indication, Coltrane himself composed what appear to be the most spiritually and socially significant recordings in his body of work. This suggests that the

---


223. See id.

224. JOHN COLTRANE, A LOVE SUPREME (Impulse! 1964); see BILL COLE, JOHN COLTRANE 158 (1976) (calling *A Love Supreme* one of Coltrane’s “most dynamic and far-reaching works” and the “highest point” of his spiritual awareness); CUTHBERT ORMOND SIMPKINS, COLTRANE: A BIOGRAPHY 179 (1975) (calling *A Love Supreme* an “extended spiritual masterpiece”); MARTIN SMITH, JOHN COLTRANE: JAZZ RACISM AND RESISTANCE 73 (2001) (calling *A Love Supreme* “Coltrane’s most profoundly spiritual statement” and his quartet’s “musical peak”).


229. Strickland, supra note 2, at 100.


Copyright Act should not focus solely on rewarding artists for their creative efforts; rather, it can and should be a tool for focusing creative practices in a way that facilitates democratic discussion. While it may seem counterintuitive, society may be better served by an “unjust” copyright policy that pushes artists to reach deeper and write their own compositions than by laws that attempt to reward proportionally creators for their contributions.

Lord Macaulay once called copyright “a tax on readers for the purpose of giving a bounty to writers,” in a speech to the House of Commons that has become a pillar of copyright jurisprudence. 233 Macaulay was half right. Copyright may be a tax on consumers, but, as this Article has shown, it does not have to be used exclusively for the purpose of providing a bounty to writers. Like any legal code, the Copyright Act has molded social practices. Copyright has the power to influence how musicians create their works as well as the ability to subsidize their art. Creative customs are not static. Instead, history demonstrates that musicians shift their artistic methods to maximize their pecuniary rewards.

Sociologists have long studied how music can expand the horizons of a community and allow for the sharing of experiences, interests, and identities. 234 It is time for the legal community as well to recognize the contributions of performers to the functioning of democracy. A “systematic understanding of how copyright supports democratic institutions” 235 demonstrates the insufficiency of the conventional wisdom regarding public performance rights. By encouraging performers to write their own compositions, the denial of a full performance right in sound recordings substantially contributes to democratic flourishing while imposing only small costs on performers.

---

234. See, e.g., MATTERN, supra note 177, at 23.
235. Netanel, supra note 204, at 289.