

“Featuring Music From”: Song, Sound, and Remix Lindsay Giggey

Popular songs may have an increased presence on modern television, but they are by no means new. Musical tie-ins existed as branding opportunities in early television as illustrated by successful novelty albums featuring non-singers, like Edd Byrnes of *77 Sunset Strip*; shows like *Hawaiian Eye* that found success through its weekly musical numbers; or shows like *The Monkees* whose very premises centered around musical acts. As these examples proved audiences would engage with characters on different media platforms, producers have further extended their narratives by utilizing non-diegetic music to heighten emotion and create powerful associations between songs and situations. With history in mind, modern television producers know segments of their core audience will buy music to extend their engagement with media texts.

Although the branding implications associated with contemporary television shows feel modern, its origins are apparent in earlier television. By the late 1950s, the proliferation of rock-and-roll created a divide between music produced and distributed for teenagers versus adults, and teenagers became primary music purchasers. In an effort to profit from the music trend amongst teen buyers, Warner Bros. seized the opportunity to connect their young in-house stars with music to capitalize on their popularity. As *77 Sunset Strip* approached its peak in 1959, Warner Bros. Records released an album featuring Edd Byrnes as his alter ego entitled *Kookie: Star of 77 Sunset Strip*. The top charting single, “Kookie, Kookie (Lend Me Your Comb), a duet with Connie Stevens, incorporated Kookie’s signature comb and jive talking gimmick in musical form. Although Byrnes did not sing on *77 Sunset Strip*, he promoted the song with Stevens on *American Bandstand*. The *Bandstand* performance provided visual cues further connecting Byrnes, Kookie, and the album. Although Byrnes was the primary draw, Stevens’ presence simultaneously promoted her burgeoning recording career and the upcoming premiere of *Hawaiian Eye*. It also conditioned audiences to accept music within a detective show, which was *Hawaiian Eye*’s central gimmick.

As Cricket Blake, Stevens engaged directly with consumer desire for music by singing within the diegetic space in every episode. In addition to Stevens, Warner Bros. signed *Hawaiian Eye* stars Poncie Ponce and Robert Conrad to recording deals. Because Warner Bros. owned the rights to all the music performed on the show, they could easily and cheaply release it for purchase.ⁱ In addition to a *Hawaiian Eye* soundtrack album in 1960 featuring tracks by Stevens, Conrad, and Ponce, all three released subsequent solo albums exploiting preexisting knowledge of the characters as a selling mechanism. For instance, native Hawaiian Ponce had an album of Hawaiian style songs,ⁱⁱ Conrad’s albums featured ballads, which emphasized the complexity of his on-screen persona,ⁱⁱⁱ and Connie Stevens’ albums accentuated her similarities with Cricket. Tellingly, Stevens’ biggest hit was from 1960’s *As Cricket*, signaling the peak of her popularity and viewer identification with her, Cricket, and *Hawaiian Eye*. These successes paved the way for programming like *The Monkees*, *The Partridge Family*, *Hannah Montana*, and *Glee*, all of which feature diegetic performances and accompanying music for purchase.

Whereas historical shows used characters as their vehicle for direct musical tie-ins, contemporary shows often feature non-diegetic music as an opportunity to extend shows’ brands. The musical montage has become ubiquitous recently and utilized by a

wide range of shows, including *Grey's Anatomy* and *Gossip Girl*, where a song's tone and lyrics highlight emotion and replace dialogue. Implementing music infuses stories with mood and subtly (or not so subtly) directs viewers as to how they should engage with what they see. Television musical montages are frequently used at climatic melodramatic moments where characters move through actions and spaces accompanied only by the music. Viewer reactions are heightened because music interrupts realistic depictions of life, which does not have a musical score. Music compels viewers to infer connections between what they see and hear. Lyrics demand additional viewer attention as they offer a meta-commentary as they enrich the score and character actions.

Moreover, modern shows use music to craft replicable lifestyles via purchasing decisions both characters and consumers can make. In this case, listening and purchasing becomes emblematic of viewer identification. Incorporating consumption with what is seen and heard on television allows viewers to construct themselves in the image of their idols. Songs are carefully chosen to reflect emotional beats as well as the characters, their lifestyles, and the overall tone of the show. As programming redirects itself towards niche audiences, musical selections represent another vehicle for differentiation in a rapidly increasing television landscape.

Targeting niche audiences with music replicating the atmosphere of their favorite shows becomes an opportunity to connect with increasingly disparate audiences. As CD sales continuously diminish and MTV no longer plays music videos, increased musical integration into television shows becomes a natural progression to launch new talent. Historical television featured pop music and stars to hook new audiences whereas contemporary television uses its audiences to introduce rising musical acts.

ⁱ Douglas Whitney, "Warner's General Whitney: The Producer Assembles His Products," *TV Guide*, October 31, 1959, 23.

ⁱⁱ Poncie Ponce Album Sales release, Publicity Department File, May 3, 1962, Folder 678A, *Hawaiian Eye* special box, Warner Bros. Archive, School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California, pg. 1.

ⁱⁱⁱ Robert Conrad album press release to Lee Belser, Publicity Department File, September 30, 1960, Folder 678A, *Hawaiian Eye* special box, Warner Bros. Archive, School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California, pg. 1.