

Music Made for TV: Reassessing the History of Pop Music in/on Television

Popular Music and Authenticity in AMC's *Mad Men*

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"Lady Lazarus," an episode of *Mad Men's* fifth season, ends with a familiar sound for most viewers as the Beatles' "Tomorrow Never Knows" plays over the final scene and the episode's credits. In a *New York Times* article about the show's purchase of the song, *Mad Men's* creator Matthew Weiner remarked, "Even people who are not in the clearances and rights business were struck by the fact that that was actually the Beatles...You just get the satisfaction of knowing that was not an imitation and it's that recording" (Itzkoff and Sisario). The use of "Tomorrow Never Knows" is essential for a show that is very much concerned with communicating an "authentic" experience of 1960s aesthetics. A recent profile on Kathryn Allison Mann, *Mad Men's* head of research, revealed that each season involves a detailed timeline of noteworthy events in news, politics, and culture (Blake). But authenticity isn't cheap, especially as popular music becomes integral to late 1960s popular culture. "Tomorrow Never Knows" was purchased by Lionsgate for a whopping price of \$250,000. Early in its final and seventh season, the show has increased its use of prominent musical selections to evoke a *feeling* of the late 60s, drawing on bands such as Spencer Davis Group, Vanilla Fudge, and the Jimi Hendrix Experience to add an "authentic" soundtrack for New York and Los Angeles in 1969.

The construction of authenticity by rock music has been a central mode of analysis for popular music studies and it effectively offers a perspective for considering the role of popular music in contemporary television, particularly for the ways in which premium cable dramas now generate discourses of authenticity in reviews, in fan discussions, and so forth. The inclusion of popular music on television, particularly rock music, reflects a shift in the understanding of television from operating as "inauthentic" mass culture to "authentic" culture, a shift that has made space for popular musical recordings with large licensing fees. Simon Frith writes that through the 1950s and 1960s "a simply syllogism" established that "rock 'n' roll was defined by youth radio; youth radio was defined against TV; rock 'n' roll was defined against TV" (282). K.J. Donnelly adds that the absence of music on television has often been tied to television's lower production values (i.e. the "small screen") (331). However, for *Mad Men* and series like it (those contemporary shows that have been defined as "megamovies," a term linked to *Mad Men* in a 2009 *Atlantic* piece by Benjamin Schwartz) popular music is increasingly central to a convincing and engaging narrative and overall aesthetic.

The first scene to feature Don Draper in season 7 involves him character shaving, dressing, and arriving in Los Angeles set to "I'm a Man" by the Spencer Davis Group. This is an appropriate song choice given its title and the show's ongoing focus on gender roles of the era (after arriving in L.A., Don's wife, Megan, confidently takes the driver's seat after he opens the passenger side's door for her). A pivotal scene from later in the season cues Sinatra's "My Way," a song that reflects on life before death,

after Peggy Olson thinks up a groundbreaking campaign for a burger chain that recognizes the changing nature of the American family at the end of the 1960s and the end of 1950s family values.

These popular musical selections add depth to key elements of the show's narrative in season 7 and serve to expand *Mad Men's* "authentic" aesthetics from the visual to the audible. The prominence of popular music in a period drama series also raises questions about the cost of using music in television and the resulting influence on popular history and nostalgia. For instance, what sort of discrepancies are there between shows that can afford to license songs by the Beatles and shows that cannot? Further, how is popular memory shaped by the combination of popular music with images in period dramas? Frederic Jameson claims that the past is only retrievable through images and "the postmodernist aesthetic reduces the past simply to image/style, to a costume party that encourages a media-derived nostalgia" (qtd. in Tudor), and Alison Landsberg conceives of a "prosthetic memory" that popular culture "generates through repackaging memories and images from the past" (qtd. in Cubitt). The process by which music is selected, licensed, and used in contemporary television is an increasingly active site for exploring the construction of authenticity and the repackaging of history in popular culture.