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Op-Ed Article
Written for Rolling Stone magazine
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Protecting Intellectual Property in the Music Industry

Why Copyright protection is crucial in the age of digital music sharing

Music is everywhere. Today, artists all over the world have the power to upload their music online where anyone can access it. This can be a great opportunity for creatives to share their work and grow their fanbase, however it also raises the likelihood of intellectual theft.

Copyright infringement has always been an issue within the music industry, but the ever changing shift to digital music and online streaming has made getting away with infringing on intellectual property easier.

Copyright laws were put in place to protect the rights of creative individuals' work. These laws give intellectual property owners control over their unique works that are fixed in a tangible form. This protection is meant to keep others from stealing preexisting work and claiming it as their own. The music industry thrives on creativity. Copyright laws enforce incentive to create new music, unlike what is already out there. Without this set of laws, the genres and trends that we know and love would not exist; we would be listening to the same few songs over and over again. Imagine coming across a song you really like, making the beat faster then releasing the song as your own. Most copyright infringement cases are not that obvious but that analogy gets the point across when stating that infringing on others' intellectual property is, in fact, theft. Hardworking creatives can miss out on the credit they deserve as well as monetary royalties that could be earned.

Informing the general public of the importance of music copyright laws and how they keep the music industry thriving is important to not only the artists, but the fans as well. Giving credit where credit is due keeps artists making art, which enriches everyone's lives and shapes music culture. The music industry is always growing and evolving. Anyone who has ever, or will ever, put their music on the internet should know the basics of copyright law and how it protects their intellectual property.

Music is universal and should be celebrated and shared by everyone. I understand the point of view from those who believe that music should have no boundaries. The fact of the matter is that it's only fair to creatives to be credited for their work. There is a common argument that sampling an artist's work and making it your own should not be considered copyright infringement. Any derivatives of an existing original work would be considered infringing on copyright law if approval was not granted beforehand.

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The only way around this is for the derived work to be considered fair use. In order to be within the confines of the fair use argument, the work must not include a large portion of the original work, must not be a significant part of the original work, not harm the monetary value of the original work, and be used for educational purposes.

There is nothing wrong with being inspired by a work and wanting to make music that provokes the same feelings, but there are ways to do it that are, not only more appropriate but, legal. The solution to all new and current musical artists out there— get approval! You'll find that most musicians will be flattered and allow you to sample their music. You get to make your own creative works using samples from others' and those you admire get a little recognition and a small profit. Everyone wins. Copyright infringement laws are set in place to encourage unique intellectual property, to protect those in creative fields, to prevent theft, and to encourage people to be decent human beings and do the right thing; it's about ethics. The music industry is extremely competitive but all songwriters and musicians can benefit from abiding by the laws of copyright protection.