

Under The Covers

Unusual cover versions of classic songs have a special appeal altogether



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PURISTS WILL hate me for it but I like covers. I know there's nothing like the real McCoy but listening to cover versions of songs whose classic versions you're familiar with has a different sort of appeal. I enjoy listening to covers, especially when they're done in an unexpected way. In recent weeks there was quite a bit of that.

It all began with The Beatles. As we know September 9, 2009 was not just a rare date in terms of numerology and the calendar but also because that day saw the release of a remastered set of all The Beatles albums, a 16-disc box-set that had every album released and recorded by the world's best known band between 1962 and 1970. I haven't got my hands on that box set (which also has a lot of bonuses including documentaries, mono recordings and the like) yet, but what it has triggered is a good deal of nostalgia that recalls the Beatlemania of yore.

For instance, a surge of webcasts related to The Beatles. One of these was a song-by-song cover version of the entire *Abbey Road* album. Besides its iconic album cover of the four Beatles crossing the road, *Abbey Road* (1969) is considered by many as their favourite Beatles album. The song-by-song cover version that I heard was, at least in part, excellent. Every song was covered in the same sequence as on the album but what made it really good was the artists who performed the songs: *Come Together* was by Paul Weller (formerly of The Jam), Noel Gallagher and Paul McCartney; *Something* was by English actor Jim Sturgess from the *Across The Universe* film; and *Maxwell's Silver Hammer* was by Ukelilli, a young American artist who uses the ukulele as her accompanying instrument. Plus, there was Glasgow's Belle & Sebastian doing an excellent live version of *Here Comes The Sun*; American folk-rocker Trina Hamlin's acoustic version of *Oh! Darling*; Europe's soul band Tok Tok Tok's version of *Her Majesty*; and many other bands doing the rest of the songs on *Abbey Road*.

Then, someone pointed me to another cover album, the recently released Cheap Trick's live version of *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, done in the American power-pop band's trademark style - with a nice edgy touch to melodic tunes. I could be mistaken but wasn't it John Lennon who'd once famously said that *Sgt Pepper's* would be impossible to perform live? Well, Cheap Trick

SOMETHING WAS PERFORMED BY ENGLISH ACTOR JIM STURGESS



PLAY IT AGAIN

The American power-pop band, Cheap Trick (above), recently released a live version of the Beatles' (below) iconic *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*



have pulled it off and both the CD as well as the DVD are collectibles. In the mood for covers, I turned to the Nugs network, where I found covers, not of The Beatles songs, but other classics. All performed live by the classic jam band, Phish. On a lengthy mp3 that goes on for more than an hour and forty five minutes, I got to hear the reunited band playing a staggering version of New Orleans legend, Allen Toussaint's *Sneakin' Sally Thru the Alley*; a version of Talking Heads' *Crosseyed and Painless*; Velvet Underground's *Oh! Sweet Nuthin*; Stevie Wonder's *Boogie On Reggae Woman*; and AC/DC's *Highway to Hell*. The highlight was a track where Bill Kreutzmann, former drummer with the Grateful Dead, sat in with Phish to play a version of Richard Strauss's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (which was used by Stanley Kubrick in his film, *2001: A Space Odyssey*) If you've never heard Phish or tried to and, well, didn't take to them immediately, I suggest you download this lengthy mp3 (link on the blog... see details below) and give it a listen.

Beck Hansen, the artist known as Beck, has just begun a novel project called the *Record Club*, where he invites colleagues from the music scene to collaborate and interpret one entire classic album at a time, all the tracks of which are then offered for download on his website (<http://beck.com>). The first album in the project was a cover of *Velvet Underground & Nico*, which features Nigel Godrich, a noted recording engineer; Joey Waronker, a sessions musician, Iceland's Thorunn Magnusdottir and Beck himself. The second project, now in the works, is *Songs Of Leonard Cohen*. The first track, *Suzanne*, is out on the website and those who've played on it include, besides Beck, musicians from bands like Aussie hard-rockers Wolfmother; Brooklyn duo MGMT and Brazilian-American band, Little Joy. It's worth checking out.

Those weren't the only covers I got to hear recently. Just the other day, the good doctor sent me an email. I'm referring to Dr Rupak Das, a Mohali-based surgeon who also has his own band and whose music I've mentioned in an early installment of *Download Central*. Well, Dr Das sent in five links to videos of his new covers - there's his version of Metallica, Jimi Hendrix and The Doors songs. The links, as usual, are on the web version of this column.

To give feedback, stream or download the music mentioned in this column, go to <http://blogs.hindustantimes.com/download-central/>



YESTERDAY
Beck Hansen invites colleagues from the music world to interpret one entire classic album at a time

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