

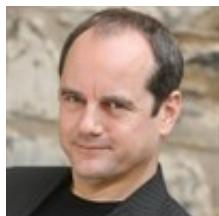
Christopher Gillett | 13 October 2014

## Crossover A dirty word?



Bond. Decca/Mitch Jenkins

For singers to count as crossover artists, they must first demonstrate that they have actually crossed from one genre to another, argues Christopher Gillett, who explains why the C-word holds no currency in his household.



There's a word you shouldn't utter in our house. It's 'crossover'.

You shouldn't say it, not because it's nothing but wall-to-wall Wagner and Mahler where we live, but because it (the C-word) drives my wife in particular absolutely nuts. And that's not pretty. You don't want to be a part of that.

My wife, Lucy Schaufer (<http://lucyschaufer.com/>), is not like me. She's unusual. She will sing anything, just as long as it's good. Classical, contemporary, musicals, James Taylor... It has to be good. She won't sing a Spice Girls number that has been translated into Italian (the standard trick for magically turning pop songs into 'classics'). No, it has to be good.

This translating thing has surely gone too far. I saw the track list for a Katherine Jenkins album the other day, and every number that was originally foreign had been given entirely new English texts while all the English tracks had been bunged into Italian. It reminded me of a theory I once heard about the rise of 'authentic' performance. The thinking went that we all have an innate taste for the new, and when contemporary music was at its most difficult (the 'squeaky gate' era), along came a way of hearing the familiar in an entirely new way, played on period instruments. Rather than listening to new music, we could now listen to new-but-old music. Our craving for the new could be satisfied and, boom, the authentic movement took off with a bang.

**To call Katherine Jenkins a 'crossover artist' she would have to cross from one genre to another. And she doesn't.**

I'll grant you this might not be quite the same thing as hearing Katherine Jenkins reinventing a Dolly Parton number by warbling it in Italian, but you get my drift. At the risk of hearing crockery fly around the house, you might be tempted to call Jenkins a 'crossover artist' – but in order to do that, she would have to cross from one genre to another. And she doesn't. She's not an opera singer, as she (I'm told) makes quite clear. And I've never seen her down to do a Handel *Messiah*, or a B minor Mass. So from what genre is she coming, and to which genre is she going when she does this 'crossing over'?

I tried it once. Sort of. I was in a close harmony sextet (along with Michael Chance and John Graham-Hall) that was cobbled together to appear on ex-prime minister Harold Wilson's chat show in about 1980. I sang the solo in 'Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head' in my best ex-choral scholar croon. I was awful, mostly I think because I was a snob about it. Mind you, I wasn't as awful as Harold Wilson proved to be as a chat show host.

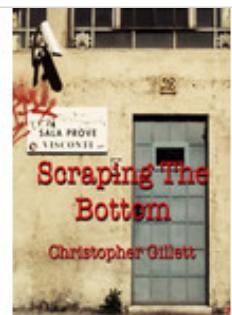
My wife Lucy, on the other hand, unburdened with snobbery, can move seamlessly from genre to genre without batting an eyelid and do it extremely well, as a career singing in both opera and music theatre will attest. As she says, 'good music is good music and good singing is good singing'.

'Crossover' has, in general, become a euphemism, a clue that what you will hear is neither good music nor good singing. Which is why you don't say it in our house.

**Read more of Christopher Gillett on Sinfini Music (</uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/singers-on-the-road-with-dogs>).**

The tenor's own blog is christophergillett.co.uk. (<http://christophergillett.co.uk/>)

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