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WHITE BLACK LEGAL is an open access, peer-reviewed and refereed journal providededicated to express views on topical legal issues, thereby generating a cross current of ideas on emerging matters. This platform shall also ignite the initiative and desire of young law students to contribute in the field of law. The erudite response of legal luminaries shall be solicited to enable readers to explore challenges that lie before law makers, lawyers and the society at large, in the event of the ever changing social, economic and technological scenario.

With this thought, we hereby present to you

# **INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY**

AUTHORED BY - KOPAL SINGH

## **Introduction**

Copyright is a vital aspect of intellectual property rights, particularly in the music industry. It ensures that creators of original works have the exclusive legal rights to use and control their creations. In music, copyright protection extends to a variety of elements, including musical compositions, lyrics, sound recordings, and arrangements. These rights are critical for enabling musicians, songwriters, performers, and producers to benefit financially from their works, while also ensuring that their creative expressions are protected from unauthorized use and exploitation.

Musical copyright is established when a work is deemed original and fixed in a tangible form, whether in written notation, a sound recording, or a digital file. To qualify for copyright protection, the work must possess originality and be fixed in some physical form that can be perceived, reproduced, or otherwise communicated. In the case of music, the protection covers the musical composition, which includes the melody, harmony, and rhythm, as well as the accompanying lyrics, if applicable. Additionally, copyright protection extends to the arrangement of the music, including the orchestration or specific performance of the piece.<sup>1</sup>

An important distinction to understand in the context of musical copyright is that it does not protect the underlying idea, concept, or genre of the music itself. Rather, copyright only applies to the specific expression of the musical idea as captured in the composition or recording. For example, a song's melody is copyrighted, but not the general idea of a love song or a specific musical genre. Therefore, musicians and songwriters can freely create works within a genre or inspired by other ideas, as long as their specific expression remains original.

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<sup>1</sup> **Marshall, L. M.** (2015). *The Future of Music and IP Rights*. Journal of Music Research, 8(2), 144-



## **The Protection of Musical Compositions, Lyrics, and Recordings**

One of the primary functions of copyright in the music industry is to safeguard the rights of creators, performers, and producers by preventing unauthorized use or duplication of their works. Copyright grants the owner exclusive rights to reproduce, distribute, perform, and otherwise control the use of the music. This means that no one can legally copy, distribute, or publicly perform the music without obtaining the proper authorization from the copyright holder.

For example, if a songwriter creates a song, they hold the exclusive right to determine how that song is used in various contexts. They can decide whether to allow the song to be included in a film, used in a commercial, or performed at a concert. If someone wants to use the song, they must obtain permission from the songwriter or copyright holder, often through licensing agreements. In exchange for granting permission, the creator is typically compensated, ensuring that they are remunerated for the use of their work.<sup>2</sup>

The protection also applies to sound recordings, which are distinct from musical compositions. A sound recording represents a specific fixation of the performance or rendition of a musical composition, usually captured in a studio recording or other audio medium. Copyright in sound recordings gives the owner the exclusive right to distribute copies, sell, and license the recording. This protection ensures that producers and recording artists are able to profit from the commercial exploitation of their recordings, such as through sales, streaming, or airplay.

## **The Role of Copyright in the Economic Value of Music**

Copyright plays a central role in maintaining the economic value of music by establishing a framework for creators to receive proper compensation for their work. Without copyright protection, creators would have limited control over how their works are used and exploited, making it difficult for them to profit from their efforts. Copyright ensures that artists, songwriters, and producers can monetize their creations through various channels, such as album sales, royalties from public performances, and licensing deals.

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<sup>2</sup> Bently, L., & Sherman, B. (2020). *Principles of Intellectual Property*. Oxford Press



For example, the use of a song in a movie or TV show is a valuable opportunity for the copyright holder to receive royalties. Similarly, a song used in a commercial or as part of a soundtrack can generate significant income for the creator. These revenue streams would be difficult to secure without copyright protection, as unauthorized use could undermine the ability of the creators to benefit financially from their work.

Furthermore, copyright helps to promote innovation and creativity in the music industry. When creators know that their works are protected and that they have the right to control how their music is used, they are more likely to invest time and effort into developing new compositions and recordings. This fosters a creative environment where new ideas can flourish, knowing that creators have a legal means to protect their intellectual property.

### **The Importance of Licensing and Royalties**

One of the key components of music copyright is the ability to license works for various uses. Licensing agreements allow third parties to use copyrighted music in exchange for payment. There are several types of music licenses, including synchronization licenses (for use in films, television shows, or advertisements), mechanical licenses (for reproduction of music on physical or digital media), and performance licenses (for public performances of music). These licenses provide a way for copyright holders to generate income from their music while retaining control over how it is used.

For example, when a song is played on the radio, the radio station typically pays royalties to the songwriter or copyright holder through a performing rights organization (PRO) such as ASCAP, BMI, or SESAC. These organizations track the use of music in public performances and collect royalties on behalf of the creators. Similarly, when a song is streamed on platforms like Spotify or Apple Music, the streaming service pays royalties to the copyright holder based on the number of plays.<sup>3</sup>

The system of licensing and royalties ensures that creators are compensated for the use of their work and helps maintain the financial viability of the music industry. It also provides a

<sup>3</sup> **Smith, R. P., & Houghton, S.** (2018). *IPR in the Global Digital Economy*. Cambridge University

mechanism for ensuring that music creators are paid fairly for their contributions, even when their work is used in ways that they may not have originally anticipated.

### **The Role of Copyright in Protecting Creative Expression**

In addition to its economic significance, copyright serves as a safeguard for the **moral rights** of creators, protecting their ability to control how their works are presented to the public. In many jurisdictions, moral rights grant authors the right to attribution (the right to be recognized as the creator of a work) and the right to integrity (the right to prevent distortion or mutilation of their work). These rights are particularly important in the music industry, where an artist's creative vision is closely tied to the final product.

For example, if a song is altered or used in a context that misrepresents the artist's intentions, the artist can exercise their moral rights to prevent such use. This ensures that their work is treated with respect and that their creative integrity is preserved.

### **The Challenges of Copyright in the Digital Age**

While copyright remains an essential tool for protecting music creators, it faces numerous challenges in the digital age. The widespread availability of digital music and the ease with which it can be copied and distributed have made it difficult to enforce copyright laws. Digital piracy, including illegal downloading and streaming, continues to be a significant problem in the industry, undermining the ability of creators to earn income from their works.<sup>4</sup>

In response, many artists and record labels have embraced digital rights management (DRM) tools and other technological measures to protect their music from unauthorized distribution. These tools can include encryption, watermarking, and access controls, which help prevent unauthorized copying and sharing of digital music files. However, while these tools can help reduce piracy, they are not foolproof, and new methods of infringement continue to emerge as technology evolves.

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<sup>4</sup> • **U.S. Copyright Office.** (2020). *Circular 56: Copyright Protection for Sound*  
Retrieved from

Additionally, the rise of **user-generated content** on platforms like YouTube and TikTok has raised questions about how copyright laws should apply to content created by individuals who may not own the rights to the music they use. These platforms have implemented various systems, such as content ID systems, to identify and manage copyrighted music, but they face ongoing challenges in balancing the interests of copyright holders with the rights of users to create and share content.

In conclusion, copyright is a cornerstone of intellectual property protection in the music industry, providing creators with the exclusive rights to control and profit from their works. From musical compositions to lyrics and sound recordings, copyright ensures that creators, performers, and producers can safeguard their intellectual property and receive fair compensation for their contributions. As the music industry continues to evolve in the digital age, it will remain essential for creators to understand the importance of copyright and actively protect their works from unauthorized use. With the continued development of licensing systems, royalties, and technological protections, copyright will continue to play a crucial role in maintaining the economic and creative vitality of the music industry.

### **Types of Works Protected Under Copyright**

Music copyright plays a critical role in safeguarding the different creative works within the music industry. Each type of work, whether it is a sound recording, musical composition, lyrics, or arrangement, is granted a distinct set of rights and protections under copyright law. Understanding the specific rights associated with these works is essential not only for creators but also for those involved in the distribution, commercialization, and protection of music.<sup>5</sup>

### **Sound Recordings**

Sound recordings are one of the primary categories of works protected under copyright in the music industry. A sound recording refers to the specific, fixed recording of a musical performance or composition that is captured in a tangible medium. This can include traditional formats such as CDs and vinyl records, as well as digital formats such as MP3 files and

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<sup>5</sup> • **Ginsburg, J. C.** (2001). *Copyright and the Music Industry: An Overview*. Columbia of Law & the Arts, 25(1), 23-



streaming audio. Copyright in a sound recording is distinct from the copyright in the underlying musical composition, and it generally belongs to the entity that owns or produced the recording, such as the record producer, the performer, or the record label.

The copyright in a sound recording protects the recording itself and the particular way in which the performance is captured and fixed in the medium. For instance, it safeguards the unique version of a song as performed in a recording, including the particular choices made in terms of vocal delivery, instrumental arrangement, and production. However, the copyright in a sound recording does not extend to the musical composition or the lyrics unless the composition has been explicitly licensed as part of the recording. Thus, while an artist may own the copyright to the recording, the original songwriter or composer holds the rights to the musical composition, unless otherwise specified.

### **Musical Compositions**

A musical composition refers to the original work created by the composer or songwriter, encompassing the melody, harmony, rhythm, and structure of the piece. This type of work forms the foundation of a song and is protected by copyright from the moment it is created and fixed in a tangible form, such as written sheet music or a digital file. The musical composition is the blueprint for the sound recording and, as such, is separate from the recording itself in terms of copyright protection.

Copyright in a musical composition protects the expression of the music—how the melody and harmony are arranged and written. It ensures that no one can replicate, distribute, or perform the music without the creator's consent. Importantly, the copyright in the composition exists even if no lyrics are included; thus, instrumental works are also protected under this category. This protection gives the composer exclusive rights to control how their work is used, including who may create derivative works, like arrangements or adaptations, and whether the composition may be performed publicly or used in movies, commercials, or television shows.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> • **Towse, R.** (2014). *Copyright in the Music Industry*. In *The Oxford Handbook of the Economy*. Oxford University

The ownership of a musical composition is typically held by the composer or songwriter, but it may also be assigned to a publisher or other entities, especially when the work is professionally distributed. In the case of collaborations, ownership is often shared, and the distribution of rights is determined by the agreement made between the parties involved, typically reflected in a publishing contract.

### **Lyrics**

Lyrics, the written words that accompany a song, are also protected separately under copyright law as literary works. The lyrics, which may be integral to a song or serve as a standalone poem, are protected from unauthorized reproduction, distribution, and public performance. Similar to musical compositions, copyright protection for lyrics is granted automatically when the work is created and fixed in a tangible form, such as when they are written down or typed.

If a song includes both music and lyrics, copyright ownership is generally shared between the author(s) of the lyrics and the composer(s) of the music. In situations where multiple parties contribute to both the music and the lyrics, ownership is typically divided according to the terms of an agreement between the creators. The copyright holder of the lyrics retains the exclusive right to control the use of the words, including their reproduction, adaptation, and performance. In some cases, songwriters and lyricists may enter into publishing agreements where they assign their rights to a publisher, who then manages the licensing and royalty collection process on their behalf.

Additionally, the use of lyrics in various media—such as film, television, or advertising—requires permission from the copyright holder. The licensing process allows the creator to profit from the use of their work while maintaining control over how their lyrics are portrayed and used. This ensures that lyricists are compensated for the artistic contributions they make to a song.<sup>7</sup>

### **Arrangements**

A musical arrangement refers to the adaptation and orchestration of a musical composition, specifically focusing on the instrumental choices, harmonies, and overall performance structure.

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<sup>8</sup> • **Barrett, S. D.** (2012). *Music Law: How to Run Your Band's Business*. Hal Corporation

It involves deciding how a piece will be performed, who will play what instruments, and how the music will be orchestrated to create a particular sound or atmosphere. In some cases, an arrangement can significantly transform the presentation of the original composition, such as a jazz band's reinterpretation of a classical work or a pop version of a traditional folk song.

Although the arrangement is based on the original musical composition, it is considered a creative expression in itself and is therefore eligible for copyright protection as a derivative work. However, the protection of the arrangement does not extend to the underlying composition in ways that would infringe upon the original copyright holder's rights. For example, if a musician creates an arrangement of a copyrighted song, they are entitled to copyright protection for the specific arrangement they have created, but they cannot change the core structure of the composition in a way that violates the original composer's rights.

Arrangements are often created by musicians or arrangers who have a deep understanding of music theory and performance. In many cases, arrangements are used in different genres or by different ensembles, such as orchestras, choirs, or small bands. For instance, a classical composer may arrange a piece for a string quartet, or a pop song might be arranged for a big band. While the arrangement is protected by copyright as a new work, the original composition remains the property of the composer, and any commercial use of the arrangement typically requires permission from the copyright holder of the original composition.<sup>8</sup>

### **Maintaining the Integrity and Value of Music**

Music copyright plays a critical role in maintaining the integrity of the music industry and ensuring that creators and performers are fairly compensated for their contributions. By granting exclusive rights to the creators of sound recordings, musical compositions, lyrics, and arrangements, copyright law ensures that no one can exploit these works without permission,

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<sup>8</sup> • **Barrett, S. D.** (2012). *Music Law: How to Run Your Band's Business*. Hal Corporation



protecting the economic interests of the creators and others involved in the commercialization of music.

Without copyright protection, the music industry would struggle to maintain a sustainable environment for creativity, as unauthorized use and reproduction of music would undermine the ability of creators to earn income from their works. Furthermore, copyright protections are essential for fostering innovation in the industry, as artists and musicians can feel confident that their intellectual property is secure, thus encouraging the creation of new and diverse works.

By understanding the different types of works covered by copyright and the distinct rights associated with each, creators and stakeholders in the music industry can better navigate the complexities of music ownership and distribution. As the digital age continues to shape the way music is produced and consumed, it is vital for creators and industry professionals to stay informed about copyright laws and take necessary steps to protect their works from unauthorized use, ensuring the long-term success and sustainability of the music industry.

### **Ownership of Music Copyrights**

Determining the ownership of music copyright is often a complex issue, influenced by various factors, including the agreements made between the involved parties during the creation and production process. The division of ownership rights is central to the licensing, distribution, and monetization of music. It helps clarify who has the legal right to make decisions about how the music is used, who is authorized to license it, and who should receive royalties. Understanding how ownership is structured is crucial for anyone involved in the music industry, as it dictates the financial aspects and control over the music.

### **Who Owns Music Copyright?**

The ownership of music copyright typically varies based on the nature of the work, the creators involved, and the contractual agreements made at the time of creation. Generally, the ownership of music copyright is divided among the primary stakeholders in the music creation process. These parties include songwriters, composers, record labels, and performers. The specifics of

ownership can differ significantly depending on the business arrangements made at various stages of the creation, production, and distribution of the music.<sup>9</sup>

### **Songwriters and Composers**

In most cases, the initial copyright holders of a musical work are the songwriters and composers. These individuals create the musical composition, including the melody, harmony, rhythm, and lyrics, if applicable. Copyright protection is automatically granted to the creators of the work once it is fixed in a tangible form (e.g., written down or recorded). Songwriters and composers have exclusive rights over their work, including the right to reproduce, distribute, perform, and create derivative works from the composition.

However, songwriters and composers often choose to assign or license their rights to third parties, such as music publishers or record labels, in exchange for compensation. For example, a songwriter might sign a publishing agreement with a music publisher, which will handle licensing, royalty collection, and marketing on behalf of the songwriter. In such cases, the publisher becomes the rights holder for licensing and monetization purposes, but the songwriter may retain certain rights or receive a portion of the income generated.

### **Record Labels**

Record labels are another key player in the ownership of music copyright, particularly when it comes to the rights to sound recordings. A record label typically finances the recording of a song and thus becomes the owner of the copyright in the sound recording. This ownership extends to the specific recorded version of a song, which is separate from the underlying musical composition. Even though the song's composition is often still owned by the songwriter or composer, the record label holds exclusive rights to distribute, license, and commercially exploit the sound recording.

The record label's role is critical in the production, marketing, and distribution of music. By owning the sound recording, the label can license it for use in various media, such as films,

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<sup>9</sup> • **Hedley, G.** (2016). *Music Copyright and the Digital Era: How to Protect and Profit Your Music in the Online World*.

commercials, video games, and more. Record labels may also enter into distribution agreements with streaming platforms, ensuring the music reaches a wide audience. However, record labels often share a percentage of the revenue with the songwriters, composers, and performers, depending on their contractual agreements.

### **Performers**

Performers are the individuals who execute the musical composition, such as vocalists, instrumentalists, and other musicians. While performers typically do not own the rights to the underlying musical composition unless they are also the songwriters or composers, they may hold rights in the sound recording, particularly if they have independently financed or produced their music. For instance, independent artists who self-produce and release their music may retain the copyright to both the sound recording and the composition.

In cases where performers work under contract with record labels or producers, they often assign their rights in the sound recording to these entities in exchange for a financial arrangement, such as an advance or royalties. Additionally, performers may have rights under neighboring rights laws, which provide protection for the public performance of their music, even if they do not own the copyright to the underlying composition or recording.

### **Joint Ownership**

In many cases, music copyright is owned jointly by multiple parties, including songwriters, composers, and performers. Joint ownership typically arises when two or more creators contribute to the creation of a song or recording. For example, a song might be co-written by two songwriters, or a song may feature both lyrics and a musical composition written by different individuals. In such cases, the copyright in the work is shared between the contributors, and each party holds a portion of the rights to the music.<sup>10</sup>

Joint ownership is generally governed by contracts or written agreements between the involved parties, which outline the specific shares of ownership and how profits, royalties, and other

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<sup>10</sup> • **Biddle, E.** (2015). *The Role of Music Publishers in Copyright and Licensing*. Journal Music Business and Legal Studies, 10(2), 75-



benefits will be distributed. In these agreements, the contributors may also decide who has the right to license the work, who controls its use, and how decisions about the music will be made. While joint ownership allows each creator to license and monetize their work, it also means that they must work together and share the revenue generated from the music.

In some situations, joint owners of a music copyright may face disagreements about the use or licensing of the work. In such cases, the terms of the contract or agreement between the owners will dictate how conflicts are resolved. For example, some contracts may stipulate that all parties must agree before licensing the music for use in a commercial or other media, while others may allow one party to act independently under certain conditions.

### **The Importance of Clear Ownership Structures**

Clear and well-defined ownership structures are crucial for ensuring that all stakeholders in the music industry are properly compensated for their contributions. When the ownership of a music copyright is unclear or disputed, it can lead to confusion, delays in licensing, and difficulty collecting royalties. This is particularly important in the digital age, where music is distributed through various platforms and is subject to numerous uses in movies, advertisements, and other media.

By having clearly defined ownership rights and licensing agreements, all parties involved can make informed decisions about how the music will be used and how royalties will be distributed. This transparency helps to prevent legal disputes and ensures that songwriters, composers, performers, and record labels can benefit financially from their work. It also helps to create a fair and sustainable ecosystem within the music industry, where creators and industry professionals can thrive.<sup>11</sup>

Determining music copyright ownership is an essential aspect of the music industry, affecting how music is licensed, distributed, and monetized. The ownership rights are typically divided among songwriters, composers, record labels, and performers, depending on the agreements made at the time of creation. Joint ownership may also arise when multiple parties collaborate on

<sup>11</sup> • **Morris, R. S.** (2017). *The Music Industry and Copyright Law: An Evolving Landscape*. Journal of Intellectual Property Law, 25(3), 43-

a song or recording. In all cases, clear ownership structures are crucial for ensuring that creators and stakeholders are properly compensated and can control how their work is used. By establishing and maintaining transparent agreements, the music industry can continue to foster creativity, innovation, and fairness for all involved.

### **Licensing and Royalties**

Licensing and royalties are the primary mechanisms through which creators and other stakeholders in the music industry earn income from their works. Understanding the different types of licenses and how royalties are generated and distributed is crucial for both creators and businesses in the music sector.<sup>12</sup>

- **Different types of licenses:**
  - **Synchronization License:** A synchronization license allows the licensee to use a piece of music in conjunction with visual media, such as films, TV shows, commercials, and video games. The licensee must obtain the permission of the copyright holder to synchronize the music with visual content.
  - **Mechanical License:** A mechanical license grants permission to reproduce and distribute a piece of music in physical or digital formats, such as CDs, vinyl records, or digital downloads. This license ensures that the songwriter and publisher are compensated for the reproduction of the music.
  - **Performance License:** A performance license is required when music is performed publicly, whether in concerts, bars, restaurants, or on radio and TV. Performance rights organizations (PROs), such as ASCAP, BMI, and SESAC, handle the licensing and collection of royalties for public performances of copyrighted music.
  - **Derivative License:** A derivative license allows the licensee to create derivative works based on the original composition, such as remixes or cover versions.

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<sup>12</sup> • **Morris, R. S.** (2017). *The Music Industry and Copyright Law: An Evolving Landscape*. Journal of Intellectual Property Law, 25(3), 43-

- **How royalties are generated and distributed:** Royalties are the payments made to the copyright holders for the use of their music. Different types of royalties are generated through various means, such as:
  - **Mechanical Royalties:** Generated when a music work is reproduced, whether in physical or digital format. The revenue from music sales, downloads, and streaming services like Spotify and Apple Music contribute to mechanical royalties.
  - **Performance Royalties:** Earned when music is performed publicly, either live or through media broadcasts. PROs collect these royalties on behalf of the copyright owners and distribute them based on performance data.
  - **Synchronization Royalties:** Earned when music is used in movies, TV shows, advertisements, or other audiovisual works. This is negotiated based on the license agreement between the copyright holder and the producer of the audiovisual work.

The distribution of royalties can be complex, involving several parties, such as the songwriter, publisher, performer, record label, and distributor. Clear agreements and proper tracking of music usage are essential for ensuring that royalties are fairly allocated.

### **Challenges in Music Copyright**

Despite the legal protections afforded to music through copyright, there are significant challenges in enforcing these rights, especially in the digital age. Unauthorized use, piracy, and issues related to the rapid distribution of music online are ongoing concerns for creators and stakeholders.<sup>13</sup>

- **Issues related to unauthorized use:** Unauthorized use of music, including copying and distributing music without permission, remains a significant issue. Digital platforms, peer-to-peer networks, and unauthorized websites often distribute music illegally, depriving creators and rights holders of their due compensation. While streaming services

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<sup>13</sup> **Smith, M.** (2018). *Understanding Music Copyrights: Ownership, Distribution, and*

like Spotify and Apple Music offer legal alternatives, illegal downloads continue to be prevalent.

- **Piracy:** Piracy refers to the unauthorized reproduction and distribution of music, typically through digital formats. Despite efforts to combat piracy through legal action and technological measures, it remains a major problem for the music industry, causing financial losses for creators, producers, and record labels.
- **Digital platforms:** The rise of digital music platforms has made music more accessible to a global audience, but it has also introduced challenges in protecting copyright. Many of these platforms host user-generated content, which can result in unlicensed use of music. Although companies like YouTube and SoundCloud have implemented content identification systems, the rapid pace at which new content is uploaded can make it difficult to monitor and enforce copyright protection effectively.

### **Conclusion:**

While copyright law offers critical protections for music creators and stakeholders, the challenges associated with piracy, unauthorized use, and digital distribution continue to pose significant issues that require ongoing attention and innovative solutions.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> □ Marshall, L. (2020). *Music copyright and piracy in the digital age*. Oxford University Press.



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