

Crystal Anderson, George Mason University

From Big Mama to Mamamoo: The Reverberation of R&B Vocals in K-pop Girl Groups

Abstract. K-pop music represents a unique conduit for cultural flows between Korean and non-Korean communities and cultures. What does it mean when K-pop music draws from various music styles and traditions? Some describe the practice as negative cultural appropriation and theft, while others generalize it without giving attention to the long-standing traditions from which K-pop draws. K-pop should be seen as part of the legacy of the musical traditions from which it draws. In physics, reverberation represents the persistence of a sound caused by multiple reflections of the sound within a closed space. In a similar way, R&B vocals, particularly those popularized by black female vocal groups of the 1990s, reverberate in the vocal performance of K-pop girl groups. Due to its quality musical production, K-pop has always had its share of strong individual vocalists as well as entire groups with strong vocal talent. This presentation will show how female K-pop groups such as Big Mama, Red Velvet, and Mamamoo, reverberate R&B vocals through the use of multilayered vocals, a repertoire that includes both older and contemporary genres and the combination of singing and rap. Such reverberation of R&B vocals in K-pop expands perceptions of K-pop girl groups that go beyond image.

Crystal S. Anderson is affiliate faculty in English at George Mason University, working within the fields of transnational American studies and global Asias with a focus on popular culture, visual culture, media studies, literature and audience, and reception studies. She holds a Ph.D. in American Studies from the College of William and Mary. Her first book, *Beyond the Chinese Connection: Contemporary Afro-Asian Cultural Production* (2013), uses the films of Bruce Lee to interpret cross-cultural dynamics in post-1990 novels, films, and anime. She has published articles on Afro-Asian cultural studies in several journals including *African American Review*, *MELUS*, *Ethnic Studies Review*, and *Extrapolation* as well as book chapters on masculinity in K-pop and the reception of Hallyu in the United States. She is currently completing her second book, *Soul in Seoul: Black American Music and K-pop* (under contract, University of Mississippi Press), which explores the impact of African American popular music on Korean pop, R&B, and hip-hop. She also manages several digital humanities projects, including *KPK: Kpop Kollektive*, the oldest and only aca-fansite for K-pop, and *KPOPCULTURE*, which curates K-pop through digital exhibitions on music, choreography, fandom, and industry.