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Alum's actions speak louder than words

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Graduate translates popular music videos into sign language**By Dorian Davis**
Reporter

Known by her 14,000 YouTube subscribers as "**allyballybabe**" and on the Internet as "**Ally ASL**," Baylor graduate Allyson Townsend is celebrating a return to YouTube after having her account banned for posting videos of herself transcribing popular songs using American Sign Language.

Townsend was caught off-guard November 17 when she was informed by YouTube that her videos, were in violation of music copyrights.

Facing pressure from Warner Music Group and Universal Music group, Townsend's YouTube account and videos were made inaccessible.

"I claimed every video appropriate under the fair use laws," Townsend said.

As of last Friday, however, Townsend's account is back online.

Confused by the events, Townsend requested advice from the **Electronic Frontier Foundation** (EFF), a nonprofit organization that defends the legal rights of online users and those involved in other technological fields.

"One of my followers sent me an e-mail and said she had told the EFF about the situation, and they told her they wanted to get in contact with me through her," Townsend said.

Armed with the support of thousands of fans and a resume that touts over three million YouTube views, the EFF contacted YouTube on behalf of Townsend, pleading their unjust actions.

Houston junior Lauren Laumbach, a communication sciences and disorders major, said Townsend is a relief to a wide audience of deaf and hearing impaired people who would like to watch videos transcribed into ASL, American Sign Language.

"ASL is the third most used language in the United States after English and Spanish," Laumbach said.

The Fair Use Doctrine is part of the federal copyright laws, which allows people to use work created by others without paying royalty fees and without requiring authorization from the creator, as long as it is limited use.

According to its website, YouTube reserves the right to remove any videos it finds in violation of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, a law that offers protection to digital media creators.

"When the Electronic Frontier Foundation got in the middle of it and claimed fair use, the music industry backed down and both YouTube along with Warner and Universal agreed that Ally's videos are in fact in fair use," Laumbach said.

At one point, Townsend feared she would be caught in the middle of a legal battle of media conglomerates.

Townsend said a similar situation has happened before, but she never thought it would escalate.

"I was pretty worried because this all happened a few years ago, but they didn't remove my account. They sent me e-mails saying if you violate a "three-strike" rule, then you're liable to get sued," Townsend said.

After initially finding legal consultation a few years ago, Townsend didn't think YouTube's three-strike rule would ever materialize, but YouTube followed through with its threats a few weeks ago.

"I talked to lawyers and other people about it and they said your videos are legal under the Fair Use act," Townsend said.

The EFF had a larger impact and was able to get her account back online.

Despite the scare, Townsend said her YouTube career isn't over, yet.

"I'm definitely going to make more; I'm just not sure how I'm going about doing things," she said. "I might be back in the same boat I was, but I would like to fight for this cause and get it worked out so that every artist can have interpreted music."

While closed-caption is not yet offered as an option for YouTube videos, Laumbach points out that deaf people would still have to go through the routine of translating English into ASL, which is a tedious task in comparison to watching a transcribed video.

"YouTube hasn't always had captions, and they definitely can't 'show' the music like ASL can," Laumbach said.

Townsend believes that much of the problem could be solved if the music industry would offer music transcribed into ASL.

"My reason in doing this is that it's under Fair Use and there's a huge population that wants to access them. Whether it's me, or the music industry hires someone to interpret the music, they're denying a huge population that access," Townsend said.

While Townsend has managed to reach thousands of deaf and hearing impaired people, the appeal of her videos has reached many people like herself who aren't deaf or hearing impaired. So much that she's even recruited a few of her viewers to Baylor.

"When I was attending Baylor, they had learned about the university and wanted to know more about it and join the Deaf Education and ASL department at Baylor," Townsend said.

Now with a career in teaching deaf and hearing impaired children inw Mesquite ISD, Townsend hopes that through her videos, she can continue creating awareness for ASL and giving a voice to the many people she represents.

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