

***Abe Road: Kuwata Keisuke's Beatles Parody***

***SMT-V 8.1 (January 2022)***

***Society for Music Theory: Videocast Journal***

**Noriko Manabe (Temple University)**

**ISSN 2689-5471    DOI: <http://doi.org/10.30535/smtv.7.3>**

Editor: L. Poundie Burstein

Associate Editor: Seth Monahan

This file includes the abstract, and extensive keyword list, bibliography, and related material for the video essay, “*Abe Road: Kuwata Keisuke's Beatles Parody*” by Noriko Manabe. This video-essay may be found at: <https://vimeo.com/societymusictheory/smtv081manabe> or <https://smt-v.org> .

*SMT-V* is the open-access, peer-reviewed video journal of the Society for Music Theory. Founded in 2014, *SMT-V* publishes video essays that showcase the latest research in music theory in a dynamic, audiovisual format. The journal features a supportive and collaborative production process, and publishes three to four videos per year. The videos may be found at [www.smt-v.org](http://www.smt-v.org) .

*SMT-V* is overseen by an Editor who organizes the vetting of the videos, along with an Associate Editor who aids with the technical details. Members of the editorial board help to vet submitted videos. Those wishing to publish a video on *SMT-V* should first submit a written proposal summarizing the proposed project. If the proposed project is deemed appropriate, the author will be invited to submit a draft of a storyboard or script. Upon acceptance of the script, the author will be invited to produce a full video in conjunction with guidance and assessment from selected members of the Editorial Board. Details regarding the submission process are found at [https://societymusictheory.org/smt-v/submission\\_guidelines](https://societymusictheory.org/smt-v/submission_guidelines).

## **Abstract for**

### **“*Abe Road*: Kuwata Keisuke’s Beatles Parody” by Noriko Manabe**

#### ***SMT-V* 8.2**

In May 2009, when the Japanese LDP government was in a weakened position, Kuwata Keisuke, lead singer of popular rock band Southern All Stars, performed a parody of the Beatles’ *Abbey Road* on his weekly television show. Backed by a band performing an uncanny cover of the album, he rewrote the lyrics into commentary on corruption in Japanese politics, fiscal problems, the death penalty, and other political issues.

This performance was highly unusual: Japanese recording artists rarely engage in politics. The recording and broadcast industries disallow lyrics on controversial topics, and management discourages artists from engaging in politics. Kuwata staged his rebellious gesture as a “mishearing” of a well-known album.

Kuwata transformed *Abbey Road* into political parody through linguistic sleight of hand. Kuwata chose Japanese lyrics with similar vowels and consonants (as demonstrated by their proximities on the International Phonetic Alphabet) to make them sound like the original English lyrics. By presenting his acrid commentary as a parody of this much-loved album and thus framing it as humorous entertainment, Kuwata was able to publicly criticize Japanese politicians.

#### **Keyword List**

Parody, cover, Beatles, Abbey Road, Japan, linguistics, rock, Kuwata Keisuke, music and politics

#### **Extensive Keyword List**

“Come Together”, instrumentation, diction, Beatles, lyrics, Japanese, lyrics, corruption of the LDP government, Komeito party, neoliberal capitalism, Kuwata Keisuke, Southern All Stars, popular musicians, 2009, Music Tiger, Fuji Television, parody of the Beatles’ Abbey Road, Abe Road, Abe Shinzō, Japanese prime minister, political statements censored, record producers, record companies, industry association political statements at rallies, social media, songs banned from broadcasts, catalogue, ailed Japan, resetting the lyrics of Abbey Road, sound like the original English but have a different meaning, political criticism, humor, “Golden Slumbers”, high turnover of the government cabinet, reworking of the English words into Japanese, transforms the meaning of the text, long history of Japanese covering Western songs in their own language, Auld Lang Syne, translate word for word, many syllables, multisyllabic “morae”, short prosodic units, consonant and a vowel, consonant clusters, terminal consonants, percussive sounds, unaccented vowels, metrically stronger notes, longer notes, higher-pitched notes,

International Phonetic Alphabet (or IPA), bilabial consonants, alveolar consonants, velar consonants, plosives, fricatives, approximants, transliterations, “pheta”, “fuji”, “She Came in through the Bathroom Window”, “Carry That Weight,” Kuwata’s version of “The End”, linguistics, Horari no hikari, fireflies,

### **About the Author**

#### **Noriko Manabe, author, narrator:**

**Noriko Manabe** is Associate Professor of music studies at Temple University. She researches music in social movements and popular music in Japan and the Americas. Her monograph, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised: Protest Music after Fukushima* (Oxford), won the John Whitney Hall Book Prize from the Association for Asian Studies, the BFE Book Prize from the British Forum for Ethnomusicology, and Honorable Mention for the Alan Merriam Prize from the Society for Ethnomusicology. Her second monograph, in progress, posits a typology of intertextuality in protest music and the patterns by which these methods are used. She has published articles and chapters on Kendrick Lamar’s “Alright,” music and chants of the Trump resistance, music addressing the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and Japanese hip hop. She is editor of *33-1/3 Japan*, a book series on Japanese popular music from Bloomsbury Publishing; co-editor of the *Oxford Handbook of Protest Music* (with Eric Drott); and co-editor of *Nuclear Music* (with Jessica Schwartz). She serves on six editorial boards, including the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, *Twentieth-Century Music*, and *Music and Politics*. Formerly the Treasurer of the Society for Ethnomusicology, she is currently Treasurer of the American Musicological Society, Chair of the Publication Awards Committee for the Society for Music Theory, and a member of the Finance Committee for the Association for Asian Studies. Information about her work can be found at <http://www.norikomanabe.com>.

## Bibliography

- Abe Shinzō. 2006. *Utsukushī kuni e* (Towards a Beautiful Nation). Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū.
- Bourdaghs, Michael K. 2012. *Sayonara Amerika, Sayonara Nippon: A Geopolitical Prehistory of J-Pop*. New York: Columbia U. Press.
- Hayes, Bruce. 2008. *Introductory Phonology*. 1 edition. Malden, MA ; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Ladefoged, Peter, and Keith Johnson. 2014. *A Course in Phonetics*. 7th edition. Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning.
- Manabe, Noriko. 2015. *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised: Protest Music after Fukushima*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mitsui, Tōru, ed. 2015. *Made in Japan: Studies in Popular Music*. New York: Routledge.
- Music Magazine. 2011. “Fukkatsu! Kuwata Keisuke.” Special issue on Kuwata Keisuke. *Music Magazine*, March.
- Oricon. 2020. *Oricon.co.jp*.
- Tsujimura, Natsuko, ed. 2002. *The Handbook of Japanese Linguistics*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.