MINISTER OF CULTURE

Minister takes issue, takes issue with rash of do-overs, do-overs

Is there nothing original anymore?
Lately, when driving my three little monsters around town and listening to their favorite radio stations, all the songs are remakes, or "covers," of older hit songs. Not that my kids know this.

It bums me out.
Sheryl Crow is singing Rod Stewart's "The First Cut Is the Deepest." What, she can't write her own songs? She used to. Did those two hit songs use up her vast store of talent? Maybe it was just half-vast.

Kid Rock has redone Bad Company's 1970's "Feel Like Makin' Love," complete with moaning in the background just in case the mere title of the original song is too subtle and abstract for new listeners. No Doubt is covering "It's My Life" by Talk Talk, as if anybody ever needs to hear any of that '80s computer dance music ever again.

I know it's a year old, but I just came across Counting Crows doing Joni Mitchell's "Big Yellow Taxi." I heard somebody doing a rap version of Juice Newton's "Angel of the Morning" with Buju Banton riffing big and loud in the background. I must admit I kind of like that, but I'm just a big fan of Buju. I'd like hearing him sing "The Farmer In the Dell."

Here's my big complaint. My kids don't know they're being sold used material. Old hits. Where is the artist's pride? Where is the Songwriter in these people who wants to write the new songs? It seems as if these musicians get a taste of success and then it becomes all about the quick and easy buck. The sure thing. I'm getting robbed, too.

I don't want to keep hearing recycled songs of my youth. I want my kids bringing me the hits from their generation for me to enjoy. I don't need rehashed versions of my old world. It's lose-lose, I tell you.

The other night, my wife asks if I want to watch this miniseries "Traffic." As I'm watching, it all seems familiar. Wasn't this a movie with Michael Douglas? She said that was in 2000, but that what we were watching was based on a British television show called "Traffic" in 1989.

I'm trying to get my head around this. It began as a BBC television show. Then it became an American feature film. Now it's a cable miniseries on the USA Network. What will it be next? The musical theme for a reality game show written by Kid Rock? A new all-terrain vehicle by Chrysler? It's just weird.

Almost every reality show we have on the air over here began on the BBC. What fun it must be to work in the creative area of television. It seems to consist of finding other people's material to co-opt, redo or rip off.

My sister was just in a remake of Neil Simon's 1976 movie, "The Goodbye Girl." More than one person asked me why they would remake a film that was so good the first time. Why remake something that didn't need remaking? I thought about that. It's the same kind of play-it-safe, reduced-risk thinking.

If you're at a network and you're looking for a sure thing, you go with tried and true. Corporations aren't looking for tempestual, artistic geniuses with uncompromising singular vision. They want packaging guys who can do product placement. If you're old enough to remember the original "Goodbye Girl," television people don't care about you — or me — and what we want. Adam Sandler is doing a remake of Burt Reynolds' prison football film (or is it football prison film?), "The Longest Yard."

Again, the theory being it worked once, it should work again, everybody makes money. It's just like the music my kids are listening to on the radio. Did you ever think you'd come to believe recycling was a bad thing?

Will there ever be anything new again? Of course. But the odds against something new being produced today grow greater with each passing day. It's a sorry state for bums like me who live to discover and write about the Next Big Thing. It makes me grous.

In fact, features writer John Petkovic overheard me grousing about this last week.

"You doing a column complaining about remakes?" he asked.

I nodded.
"That column's already been written," he said.

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter, mheaton@plaind.com, 216-999-4569