

Serenading the ‘Verse: *Firefly* and the Importance of Fan Song

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Joss Whedon’s *Firefly* should have faded into oblivion following its ten episode run in 2002, but despite its early cancellation, a fiercely loyal fan base grew. Blending the genres of science fiction and Westerns, *Firefly* told a story of life after the colonization of space, where war has divided a planetary system and the protagonists, having fought on the losing side, scrape out a living by smuggling on the government-ignored frontier planets. Unlike other science fiction shows, *Firefly*’s score emphasized the show’s Western elements by incorporating the twangy guitars and swirling fiddles of country music.

Recent literature in media studies has demonstrated that science fiction fans not only consume texts but actively create their own in response. Fan texts include fiction, music videos, and music. Out of all of these, fan music is the least studied. *Firefly*’s unique soundscape has inspired a plethora of fan song, perhaps the most out of all of Whedon’s texts. In this paper I analyze Marian Call’s “Vera Flew the Coop” and Vixy & Tony’s “Mal’s Song” as examples of the work that music can do within fan cultures. I argue that fan songs do three things. First, they enhance narrative experience by making fictional worlds more detailed than what texts officially show. Second, they build community as fans share music through social media or musical events at conventions. Finally, they participate in the economy of fandom. Fandom participation does not just involve the warm communal feelings; it also requires spending money. Fan songs are often part of commercial albums available at conventions or online by independent music distributors. Thus, using *Firefly*’s fandom as a case study, we see the important role that fan music plays in supporting and sustaining fandom.