



Music: Popular

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Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons have had tremendous influence on popular music. As artists, muses, producers, composers, publishers, and every role in between, gays and lesbians have left an indelible impression upon the popular consciousness through their contributions to music. Their presence can be found everywhere, from out lesbian Vicki Randle playing percussion and singing in the *Tonight Show* band, to two men dressed as cops and kissing in a Marilyn Manson music video.

Popular music has always had a gay and lesbian presence, but it has not always been out in the open. Nor has there been an entirely linear progression from total repression to today's relative openness. For example, several well known gay men, bisexuals, and lesbians of the 1920s who lived their lives openly were forced back into the closet when social mores shifted. For decades, their sexuality was obscured and hidden.

In the music industry, it is not only the "talent" who are homosexual: for example, David Geffen, founder of Geffen Records, is one of the most successful producers in recording history and one of the wealthiest men in entertainment. Similarly, Jann Wenner, founder of *Rolling Stone* magazine, long considered the rock and roll bible, is now involved in a homosexual relationship.

However, popular music remains largely a heterosexual world, and some artists, such as 1970s rocker Joan Jett and late 1980s sensation Neneh Cherry, waited until they were well beyond the height of their popularity before revealing their sexuality to fans.

In recent years, however, musicians such as Michael Stipe of R.E.M., Rob Halford of Judas Priest, Pete Townshend of The Who, and Chuck Panozzo of Styx have come out as gay or bisexual (and, in Panozzo's case, as HIV-positive). The announcement that current or former boy band members Lance Bass of 'N Sync, Steven Gately of Boyzone, and Mark Feehily of Westlife are gay seems not to have had any adverse effects on their careers.

Although many younger artists feel at ease simply to be themselves from the outset of their careers, the biggest stars in popular music are still packaged as heterosexual idols.

Homophobia is stronger in certain musical genres than others. Country and Western and Rhythm and Blues, for example, have had very few gay and lesbian personalities; and in those camps there have been career-ending scandals that centered on rumors of homosexual activity.

Some popular music genres, such as folk and disco, and heterosexual performers, such as Bette Midler and Diana Ross, are associated with gay and lesbian culture because of their popularity with that core audience



Top: A photograph of k. d. lang by Jeri Heiden.

Above: Rob Halford of Judas Priest on stage in Birmingham, England in 2005. Photograph by Andrew Dale.

Image of k. d. lang courtesy Sacks and Company.

rather than the sexuality of the performer or the content of the music.

Larger than life "divas"--the sobriquet "diva" derives from opera, a genre that is also popular with gay men--have a certain over-the-top theatrical appeal that is manifested in another product of gay culture, drag performance. Divas such as Midler, Ross, and Cher are popular objects of imitation and adulation by drag queens.

Numerous heterosexual artists, such as David Bowie and Madonna, have vaguely flirted with androgyny or homosexuality, only to back away when it seemed no longer chic or advantageous for them to bend genders. Others, such as Prince, parlayed sexually ambiguous personas into a heterosexual taboo fantasy while staunchly maintaining their own exaggeratedly "straight" orientation.

Still, some heterosexual performers sympathetic to their gay audiences have pushed boundaries with no explanation or defensiveness. An example is onetime *Advocate* cover boy Bruce Springsteen in his sensitive, ambiguous "My Lover Man" (recorded in 1990, released in 1998). And occasionally there is simply confusion--in 2001, Irish singer Sinéad O'Connor declared her lesbianism (not bisexuality), only to marry a male reporter by the end of the year.

Blues

In 1920 Mamie Smith's "Crazy Blues," written by Perry Bradford, became the first vocal blues record, selling more than 100,000 copies in its first month of release. Publishers rushed to capitalize on the market, employing popular club singers such as lesbian thrush Alberta Hunter to make recordings to meet the burgeoning demand for blues music.

The success of the blues also introduced to the public a genre with often frankly sexual lyrics, as well as a group of lesbian and bisexual performers who lived their lives freely and often flamboyantly.

Gertrude "Ma" Rainey and Bessie Smith, both openly bisexual, were among the biggest stars of the day. In their lyrics sexual double entendres abounded. References to "jelly rolls" and "handy men" were understood by the initiated, though probably not by the millions who bought their records but knew nothing about living "in the life."

However, sometimes the lesbian content was stated more plainly--Rainey's 1928 lesbian blues classic "Prove It On Me Blues" contains the unequivocal lines:

They said I do it, ain't nobody caught me
Sure got to prove it on me
Went out last night with a crowd of my friends
They must've been women, 'cause I don't like no men.

It's true I wear a collar and a tie . . .
Talk to the gals just like any old man

Similarly, Lucille Bogan, also known as Bessie Jackson, recorded "B.D. [Bull-Dykers] Woman's Blues" in 1935.

However, as the popularity of the blues waned in the 1940s and 1950s, the gay and lesbian content in popular music disappeared.

Still, as blues gave way to rock and roll, lesbian singers such as Big Mama Thornton kept the tradition alive. Thornton, a powerful performer who frequently dressed in masculine clothing, released the classic "Hound Dog" in 1953, three years before Elvis Presley.

The tradition of blues women continues in contemporary performers such as lesbian Gaye Adegbalola, one-third of the blues group Saffire: Uppity Blues Women, which she co-founded in 1984. Adegbalola released her solo album *Bitter Sweet Blues* in 1999, on which she covers Ma Rainey's "Prove It On Me Blues."

The record also includes the original composition, "Front Door Blues," with the lyrical refrain: "all of her stuff is out of the closet / but she can't walk through that front door," of which Adegbalola says: "This gay little ditty is an ode to courage."

Candy Kane is a swing, rockabilly, and blues singer from San Diego, California, whose shows have been described as like "a revival meeting in the parking lot of an x-rated bookstore." A bisexual, sex-positive former porn actress turned singer, Kane has a big voice and larger-than-life persona. Her record *The Toughest Girl Alive* (2000) features the number "(Hey Mister!) She Was My Baby Last Night."

Jazz and Cabaret

From the 1920s through the 1950s, gay composer Cole Porter wrote dozens of unforgettable songs such as "Let's Do It, Let's Fall in Love," "I Get a Kick out of You," and "Don't Fence Me In." Many of them became standards of the American songbook.

Educated at Yale where he had composed more than three hundred songs, including fight songs and musical productions, before he graduated, Porter was expected to become a lawyer but instead pursued his true love, music. Although Porter married in 1919, the marriage was not a traditional union and did little to interfere with his pursuit of homosexual affairs.

The 1945 film *Night and Day*, starring Cary Grant, was loosely based on Porter's life, but contained no reference to his homosexuality. Because of his marriage and his inarguable importance in American musical history, many biographers still downplay if not actually deny his homosexuality.

Although everyone from Ella Fitzgerald to Johnny Mathis covered his tunes, Porter's music fell out of fashion with the advent of rock and roll. Recently, however, it has experienced a resurgence in popularity. *Red Hot & Blue*, a 1990 tribute album featuring covers of Porter's songs by Neneh Cherry, k.d. lang, Erasure, and Jimmy Somerville, was a benefit for AIDS research and relief. And in 2004, a second Cole Porter biopic, Irwin Winkler's *Delovely*, appeared, this time taking a more honest view of the composer's sexuality.

Pianist Liberace was a fixture in Las Vegas and on television beginning in the 1950s. He made his Hollywood debut in 1950 and began starring in his own television show two years later. He earned two Emmy awards, but never gave up his concert career.

Liberace played to capacity crowds from Madison Square Garden to the Hollywood Bowl to Soldier Field in Chicago, where in 1955 he performed for an astonishing 110,000 people. In his flamboyant, diamond- and rhinestone-encrusted costumes, and his signature candelabra atop his grand piano, "Mr. Showmanship" brought a delightfully campy aesthetic and staggering talent to the interpretation of old standards.

When he opened in Las Vegas in 1955, Liberace became the highest paid performer in the town's history. The author of four autobiographical books, none of which mention his homosexuality, he is better remembered for his outrageous style than for his music.

Frances Faye was a Los Angeles-based vocalist and lesbian. She began a 1976 performance with "My name is Frances Faye--I'm very gay, gay, gay." Faye performed on television and in movies for nearly fifty years,

including a role as the madam in Louis Malle's *Pretty Baby* (1978). She is best known for her rendition of "Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered." Faye had a loyal gay and lesbian following until her death in 1991.

Australian Peter Allen, the cabaret singer, composer, and ex-husband of Liza Minnelli, had his biggest hit with "I Go to Rio" (1977), though he penned hits for other artists, including "I Honestly Love You" for Olivia Newton-John and "Don't Cry Out Loud" for Melissa Manchester.

Allen won an Oscar in 1982 for co-writing "Arthur's Theme (Best That You Can Do)" from Minnelli's film *Arthur*. Allen was an exuberant entertainer, known for leaping atop his piano during a performance.

Carrying on the cabaret torch, Rufus Wainwright is an openly gay singer/songwriter whose style owes more of a debt to Cole Porter than to any of his contemporaries. The son of Loudon Wainwright, III and Kate McGarrigle, his music has been described as updated American standards and is critically lauded.

More experimental jazz and vocals artists include Milwaukee-based Mrs. Fun, a keyboard and drum duo, and BETTY, a theatrical New York-based band fronted by a trio of women--Alyson Palmer and sisters Amy and Elizabeth Ziff, both lesbians--who began performing together in the 1980s.

Active on behalf of gay and lesbian causes, BETTY contributed to the *Out Loud CD*, a benefit for human rights and freedom for lesbians and gay men, and have appeared in the gender identity film *It's Pat* (1994) and the lesbian love story *The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love* (1995).

The Billy Tipton Memorial Saxophone Quartet is a Seattle-based all-woman band named for Billy Tipton, a transgendered jazz musician, born Dorothy Tipton, who lived his life as a man for more than fifty years, in part to be able to pursue a career in music, then a man's domain.

Pop

Pop music has been filled with gay and lesbian personalities. Johnny Mathis, a sweet-faced, honey-voiced singer from Gilmer, Texas by way of San Francisco, rose to fame in the 1950s, singing ballads such as "Chances Are," his first number one single, "Misty," and "Wonderful, Wonderful." He scored Top 40 hits in each of the next four decades, and his *Greatest Hits* (1958) compilation stayed an astonishing 490 continuous weeks--nearly ten years--on the Billboard Top Albums Chart.

Mathis has spent more than forty years in the recording business. It was not until 1982, however, in an *Us* magazine article, that Mathis publicly came out as gay to his long-suspecting fans, stating: "Homosexuality is a way of life that I've grown accustomed to." The revelation did not appear to affect his record sales.

British singer Dusty Springfield was the powerhouse voice behind such hits as "Wishin' and Hopin'" (1964, covered by Ani DiFranco in 1997 for the soundtrack to *My Best Friend's Wedding*) and "Son of a Preacher Man" (1968).

Regarding her sexuality, Springfield stated: "Look, let's say I've experimented with most things in life. And in sex. I suppose you can sum it up that I remain right down the middle." An icon for gay and lesbian fans, Springfield teamed up in 1989 with Pet Shop Boys for "What Have I Done to Deserve This."

Singer-songwriter Laura Nyro (1947-1997) began writing as a teenager. She released her first album in 1968 at age nineteen. Acts as diverse as Three Dog Night and Barbra Streisand covered her songs "Stoney End," "Eli's Coming," and "Stoned Soul Picnic."

Elton John is a pop chameleon known as much for his ever-changing appearance as for his music. The writer of such pop/rock classics as "Bennie and the Jets," "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road," and "Candle in the Wind," he came out to *Rolling Stone* as bisexual in 1976, then surprised fans by marrying a woman in 1984, and

later stunned gays and lesbians when he performed a duet with rabidly homophobic rapper Eminem at the 2001 Grammy awards.

An enduring presence in pop music, John is arguably the most successful and prominent gay performer today. He is now refreshingly open about his long-running relationship with life-partner David Furnish, with whom he entered into a highly publicized civil partnership in 2005.

The 1980s "New Wave" era saw a number of gay musicians find success in the mainstream. Boy George, the cross-dressing lead singer of Culture Club, burst onto the scene with the band's hit "Do You Really Want to Hurt Me?" (1982). Plagued by drug problems, George later embarked on a solo career as a singer and more recently as a DJ.

George Michael, who became a best-selling artist with the 1980s pop duo Wham! and later a successful solo artist, came out in 1998 following his arrest in a Beverly Hills park restroom on charges of soliciting an undercover male police officer. He seems not only to have survived the scandal, but also to have been liberated by it.

Pet Shop Boys, Erasure, The Smiths (with singer Morrissey, who has said: "I refuse to recognize the terms hetero-, bi-, and homo-sexual. Everybody has exactly the same sexual needs. People are just sexual, the prefix is immaterial"), Bronski Beat and The Communards (both led by mellifluous singer Jimmy Somerville, now a solo act), Frankie Goes to Hollywood, Soft Cell, and the B-52s all included gay members.

Although his own sexuality has been hotly contested, pop/jazz singer Joe Jackson perhaps best represents the gay Zeitgeist of the "New Wave" era in his 1982 song "Real Men":

See the nice boys--dancing in pairs
Golden earring golden tan
Blow-wave in the hair
Sure they're all straight--straight as a line

All the gays are macho
Can't you see their leather shine
You don't want to sound dumb--don't want to offend
So don't call me a faggot
Not unless you are a friend

Then if you're tall and handsome and strong
You can wear the uniform and I could play along

And so it goes--go round again
But now and then we wonder who the real men are.

Bisexual singer Jill Sobule's 1996 hit song "I Kissed a Girl" is one of the few explicitly lesbian-themed hit songs in recording history. Its happy, bouncy message is unequivocally celebratory of a moment of revelation as a young woman--fed up with her dumb, handsome, "hairy behemoth" boyfriend--explores her

sexuality with a friend who is equally unimpressed with her own fiancé.

The title of Sobule's album *Pink Pearl* (2000) is a wink toward female genitalia, recalling the refrain from "I Kissed A Girl": "they can have their diamonds / and we'll have our pearls" Sobule's oeuvre is filled with such wry, humorous songs; many casually refer to lesbian characters.

More recently, the ubiquitous British television and musical theater actor John Barrowman has emerged as a pop singer. Never closeted, Barrowman has been refreshingly open about his homosexuality. He is not only an accomplished singer but an engaging personality, who has attracted the devotion of pop music fans, many of whom post tributes to him and his partner Scott Gill on youtube.

Lance Bass, who rose to fame as a member of the American boy band 'N Sync, revealed his homosexuality in a cover story for *People* magazine in 2006, where he announced that "The thing is, I'm not ashamed--that's the one thing I want to say. I don't think it's wrong, I'm not devastated going through this. I'm more liberated and happy than I've been my whole life. I'm just happy."

Two members of Irish boy bands, Stephen Gately of Boyzone and Mark Feehily of Westlife, have also announced their homosexuality. In an interview in 2007, Feehily described his coming out as "the best thing I've ever done." He is in a long-term relationship with another pop singer Kevin McDaid, formerly of V.

Country

Although Canadian chanteuse k.d. lang started out her career as an alternative country singer, mainstream country music never fully embraced her. Despite her early "torch and twang" sound, lang found commercial success as a pop singer because she had one of the richest, lushest voices to be heard in popular music in years.

lang came out in *The Advocate* in 1992 and, more spectacularly, in a cover story in *Vanity Fair* in August the following year. In so doing, she became the first lesbian celebrity to so openly celebrate--and be celebrated for--her sexuality. An actress as well as a singer, lang thrilled her lesbian fans when she briefly appeared nude in the 1991 independent film *Salmonberries* in a role written for her by director Percy Adlon.

In contrast, mainstream country music has not produced any "out" stars. In 1995 singer Ty Herndon was arrested for drug possession and allegedly exposing himself to a male undercover officer in a Fort Worth, Texas park, but the career-threatening charge was dismissed and buried.

More positively, in 1992 best-selling heterosexual singer Garth Brooks recorded "We Shall Be Free," a song that espouses tolerance and acceptance. He has publicly stated his support for gay marriage. His lesbian sister, Betsy Smittle, plays in his band.

Folk

The singer-songwriter dominates folk music, and no other musical genre is as well-suited to exploring gay and lesbian lives in all their complexity, beauty, and, often, pain. Among the most famous folk legends is Joan Baez, who came out as bisexual following the dissolution of her marriage in 1972.

Janis Ian, whose "At Seventeen" (1975) was the theme song for every awkward adolescent girl, freely discusses her sexuality on her website, janisian.com. Lesser-known but no less-talented lesbian folk singers who emerged in the early 1970s include Ferron, Cris Williamson, Linda Tillery, and Holly Near. These singers have been in the forefront of women's music.

The all-women a cappella group Sweet Honey in the Rock was founded in 1973 by Bernice Johnson Reagon. While only one member of Sweet Honey was self-identified as a lesbian (Evelyn Maria Harris, who sang with

the group for eighteen years), their experience touring and working with and performing for political lesbians led Reagon to write songs specifically about women loving women.

As Reagon explained, their exposure to the lesbian community led them to "sing about oppression of every kind, including the oppression experienced by the homosexual community."

Like Sweet Honey in the Rock, lesbian vocalist, percussionist, and historian Linda Tillery explores the roots of African-American music and storytelling. In 1992 she formed the Cultural Heritage Choir to preserve this history and to perform traditional folk music such as slave field "hollers," work and play songs, and spirituals.

Grammy-winning lesbian singer-songwriters Amy Ray and Emily Saliers, the Indigo Girls, have become one of the most successful folk/pop duos in recent history. Their success is in large measure due to the fierce loyalty of their fans, many of them lesbians.

The Atlanta-based duo's first album, the multi-platinum *Indigo Girls* (1989), included their best-known song, "Closer to Fine." *Rites of Passage* (1992) featured an impassioned cover of Mark Knopfler's "Romeo and Juliet." Sung by Ray in the voice of Juliet's lover, it quickly became a lesbian classic.

However it was not until *Shaming of the Sun* (1997) that an explicit statement of either's homosexuality appeared in Saliers' "It's Alright": ". . . and it's alright if you hate that way / hate me cause I'm different / you hate me cause I'm gay"

Over the years Indigo Girls have been an integral part of a strong musical scene in Atlanta that has included lesbian singer-songwriters Michelle Malone, Kristen Hall, and Wendy Bucklew.

About the same time that Indigo Girls were making their first record, Tracy Chapman came seemingly out of nowhere with her spare, haunting single "Fast Car" from her eponymous 1988 debut album. Along with Indigo Girls, Chapman led the pack of socially conscious singer-songwriters whose voices emerged in the late 1980s.

In the 1990s Lilith Fair, Sarah McLachlan's all-woman tour dubbed "Lesbopalooza" because of the number of lesbian acts and its popularity among lesbian fans (though there is a real Lesbopalooza music festival) provided a high-profile venue for Indigo Girls, Chapman, and other like-minded acts. Melissa Ferrick, disappear fear (founding member Sonia is now a solo act), Catie Curtis, Nedra Johnson, and Toshi Reagon continue in this folk genre.

Bisexual singer Ani DiFranco became a poster girl for dykes in the early 1990s with her shaved head, combat boots, and take-no-prisoners approach to her raw, honest lyrics about relationships and politics.

A self-described "freak," DiFranco sings about relationships with both men and women; her song "In or Out" defies the persistent desire to label her as either straight or gay: "some days the line I walk / turns out to be straight / other days the line tends to deviate / I've got no criteria for sex or race / I just want to hear your voice / I just want to see your face."

DiFranco has released all of her records on the label she founded in 1990, Righteous Babe Records, which is also home to eclectic lesbian and transgendered performance band Bitch and Animal.

In a genre all her own is Los Angeles-based "all-American Jewish lesbian folksinger," performance artist, and Tupperware lady Phranc. Her eclectic oeuvre includes the records--and personalities--of "Hot August Phranc," "Surferdyke Pal," "Cardboard Cobbler," and "Milkman." Not surprisingly, humor is an integral part of her work.

Rock

In the late 1950s, Little Richard, born Richard Wayne Penniman in Macon, Georgia, brought a shockingly fey, shrieking style to rock and roll music with his smash hits "Lucille," "Tutti Frutti," "Long Tall Sally," and "Good Golly Miss Molly." Richard, an androgynous black man sporting a pompadour hairstyle, eyeliner, and tight pants, was unlike anything American culture had ever seen, yet he never altered his outrageous style to suit prevailing tastes.

In 1996 Little Richard was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. In 2000 NBC produced *The Little Richard Story*, a drama based on his life. Despite the obvious, Richard has never explicitly come out as a homosexual.

In the early 1970s bisexual British rocker David Bowie, a pioneer of "glam rock," would eventually take androgyny to a new level in his incarnation as Ziggy Stardust.

Freddie Mercury was the flamboyantly gay lead singer of the British band Queen. Anchored by his soaring voice, Queen had a string of hits throughout the 1970s and 1980s, including "Bohemian Rhapsody" and "Another One Bites the Dust." Mercury died of AIDS in 1991, just one day after publicly announcing that he was gay and infected with the disease.

Rock and roll has produced several classic songs about transvestites. Bisexual Lou Reed's seminal "Walk on the Wild Side" (1972) is an ode to homosexuals, transvestites, and hustlers Holly, Candy, Little Joe, Sugar Plum Fairy, and Jackie. Like Bowie, Reed was part of the glam rock movement as a member of Andy Warhol's Velvet Underground.

The Kinks' "Lola" (1970) is also about a young man's sexual awakening with a transsexual woman: "I'm not the world's most masculine [alternately "passionate"] man / But I know what I am, and I'm glad I'm a man / And so is Lola."

The soundtrack for *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1977) includes the song "Sweet Transvestite," performed by actor and singer Tim Curry.

Rocker Janis Joplin was a hard-living, wildly talented bisexual woman from Port Arthur, Texas, who redefined rock and roll. With her first band, Big Brother and the Holding Company, Joplin helped define the look and sound of Bay Area hippie rock music in the 1960s. Her hits include "Me and Bobby McGee" and "Piece of My Heart."

In a gesture of musical and Sapphic continuity, Joplin, along with Juanita Green, a Philadelphia woman, bought a stone to mark the unmarked grave of pioneer blues woman Bessie Smith, who died prematurely from injuries sustained in an automobile accident. Joplin herself died too young, of a heroin overdose at age twenty-seven.

Lesbians have had a significant impact in rock as well. Joan Jett rose to fame in the 1970s all-girl rock band The Runaways. Her cover of "I Love Rock and Roll" was a number one hit in 1982; "Crimson and Clover" was another hit for her. Jett came out as a lesbian in the 1990s, and has appeared as Columbia in the Broadway production of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.

4 Non-Blondes, with lesbian lead singer Linda Perry, scored a huge radio hit with their 1991 song "What's Up."

Grammy award winner Melissa Etheridge, long a staple on the lesbian club scene in Long Beach, California, had a string of successful albums before she came out nationally in 1993 at an inaugural ball for President Clinton. That same year her breakthrough best-selling album *Yes, I Am* featured the hit "Come To My

Window," with the lyrics: "I don't care what they think / I don't care what they say / What do they know about this love anyway?"

Etheridge and then-partner Julie Cypher set tongues wagging when they posed nude for a PETA [People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals] campaign in 1995, but it was nothing compared to the media coverage surrounding their revelation in January 2000 that rocker David Crosby was the biological father of their two children, conceived through artificial insemination. Etheridge has since exchanged wedding vows with actress Tammy Lynn Michaels.

Sophie B. Hawkins, whose hits include "Damn, I Wish I Was Your Lover" and "As I Lay Me Down," and who was the subject of the biographical documentary *The Cream Will Rise*, prefers the term "omnisexual" to describe her sexuality.

Fiercely independent bisexual singer Meshell Ndegéocello became the first woman artist signed to Madonna's Maverick records. Her first album, *Plantation Lullabies* (1994), featured the hit "If That's Your Boyfriend (He Wasn't Last Night)."

The Murmurs, Skin--the vocalist from the late band Skunk Anansie--and Kate Schellenbach, drummer for the late band Luscious Jackson, are also lesbian rock and rollers.

Punk

Punk music, dominated by angry young men in the 1970s, re-emerged in the 1980s and 1990s with several lesbian bands at the forefront, including L7, Sleater-Kinney, Tribe 8 (a play on the old term for lesbians, "tribade"), the Butchies, and Le Tigre.

Both the Butchies (Alison Martlew, Kaia Wilson, and Melissa York, the latter two formerly of the all-dyke punk rock band Team Dresch) and Le Tigre (Kathleen Hanna, formerly of Bikini Kill, Johanna Fateman, and JD Samson) are on Mr. Lady Records, an independent label run by Wilson and her partner, Tammy Rae Carland, that also distributes lesbian videos and films.

Le Tigre combines a fiercely feminist take on art, culture, and politics with witty, high energy pop/punk performances. Former member (and one of the founders) of Le Tigre, Sadie Benning, is a lesbian video art pioneer.

Disco

The advent of disco in the early 1970s provided perhaps the watershed moment in gay music. The disco scene, centered largely in urban areas, provided an atmosphere of tolerance and release that dovetailed with the gay and lesbian rights movement born of the Stonewall Rebellion in 1969.

Much disco music focused on themes of freedom, sex, and dancing as a means of escape from the pressures and injustices of life. Examples include "It's Raining Men" (1983) by the Weather Girls (formerly Two Tons of Fun and Sylvester's backup singers Martha Wash and Izora Rhodes [Armstead]).

At the same time, however, hits such as Machine's "There But for the Grace of God (There Go I)" (1979) addressed issues of social exclusion and discrimination. The song includes the lines "now they gotta split 'cause the Bronx ain't fit / for a kid to grow up in / 'Let's find a place' they say / somewhere far away / with no blacks, no Jews, and no gays."

The Village People, a six-man band featuring the characters of gay male stereotypes or objects of desire--Native American, Biker, G.I., Construction Worker, Cop, and Cowboy--is probably the best known gay-themed band of the disco era. The group sold more than 65,000,000 records. Their hit anthems "Y.M.C.A."

and "Macho Man" are tongue-in-cheek odes to male bonding.

The Village People even starred in their own feature film, *Can't Stop the Music* (1980). Although founding member and original Biker-Leatherman Glenn Hughes died in 2001, the band continues to perform together.

As in rock, androgyny figured prominently in disco music. Among popular gay disco singers was bisexual Grace Jones, the Jamaican-born model, singer, and performance artist whose hits include "I Need a Man" (1977) and "Pull Up to the Bumper" (1981), a thinly veiled paean to anal sex.

One of the distinguishing aspects of Jones's persona was her androgynous image, which she explained: "I always liked to wear my hair very short, and my voice was deep. So even before creating that [androgynous image] for the public, I used to go in to buy bread and they would say 'Bon jour, monsieur,' and I would try and say 'No, I am a mademoiselle,' and forget it, they'd say 'Bon jour, monsieur' again. I think I have the features of an African man When I put a wig on with long hair, I look like a hooker or a drag queen. So I look actually more feminine when I'm dressed as a man."

Sylvester (James) was born in 1946 in Los Angeles. Encouraged early on in music by his aunt, a jazz singer, he became an openly gay, cross-dressing performer, beginning his career in San Francisco performing in "The Cockettes," an androgynous musical revue. His big hits were "You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)" (1978), which both Jimmy Somerville and comedian-singer Sandra Bernhard later remade, and "Dance (Disco Heat)" (1978).

Sylvester made his film debut opposite gay icon Bette Midler in *The Rose*, loosely based on the life and career of Janis Joplin. He died of AIDS in 1988.

When disco, or dance music, experienced a rebirth in the 1990s, campy, gorgeous gay drag queen RuPaul scored big with his 1992 hit "Supermodel" and went on to host *The RuPaul Show* on VH1. As the first "face" of M.A.C. Cosmetics, he helped raise more than \$22,000,000 for AIDS research.

R&B, Hip Hop, and Reggae

Like Country and Western, R&B has remained a bastion of heterosexuality in popular music. As in country, scandals involving alleged homosexual activities have plagued some of R&B's biggest male singers.

In 1976 lead singer Teddy Pendergrass left the popular group Harold Melvin & The Blue Notes to pursue a solo career. By 1982, he was the reigning R&B sex symbol, giving women-only concerts for his adoring fans. That year, however, Pendergrass' career came to a screeching halt following an automobile accident that left him paralyzed from the chest down and his passenger, a transsexual woman, dead.

Formerly a heartthrob, Pendergrass was unable to regain his popularity. His career could not transcend his paralysis or his companion's sexuality (and the implications of it for his own sexuality).

Years later, one-time recording artist and actor Eddie Murphy found himself in a similar situation when he was caught with a pre-operative transsexual prostitute in Hollywood; Murphy insisted he was merely giving her a ride. Murphy's singing career had already run its course on the limits of his talents; though he became the butt of late-night jokes, the incident did not seem to affect his acting success.

In the 1980s singer Luther Vandross seemed to take over Pendergrass' crown, only to be dogged from the beginning of his career about rumors of his own homosexuality, which he never acknowledged. However, a 1990s *Ebony* magazine feature article began with Vandross proudly showing the reporter his David Hockney drawing of a male nude. Informed readers might draw their own conclusions.

Hip-hop, rap, and reggae are perhaps the most homophobic of popular music genres, and the lyrics have

traditionally been laced with hatred and violence. Ice Cube in "Horny Lil' Devil" (1991) brazenly states: "But horny little devil true niggaz aren't gay / And you can't play with my Yo-Yo / and definitely can't play with me you fuckin homo."

Rapper Eminem drew the ire of gay and lesbian groups in 1999 over the homophobic, violent lyrics on his album *The Marshall Mathers LP*. Although he performed a duet of the song "Stan" with Elton John at the 2001 Grammys, Eminem later claimed to have no idea that John is gay.

However, numerous female rappers--including Queen Latifah, M.C. Lyte, Da Brat, and Eve--have been presumed or rumored to be lesbians, though none of these artists has ever come out.

Perhaps the only explicit, positive reference to lesbianism in rap is in bisexual rapper Queen Pen's "Girlfriend" (1997), a reworking of Meshell Ndegeocello's "If That's Your Boyfriend (He Wasn't Last Night)," featuring an Ndegeocello cameo.

A more recent phenomenon, hip-hop lesbians and homo thugs, has garnered mainstream press in publications such as VIBE and XXL. Brooklyn-based Caushun (Jason Herndon), who has been spotlighted in these articles, bills himself as "The Gay Rapper." He has had success on New York radio and has been featured on MTV's program *The 10 Spot*.

The lyrics of reggae songs frequently advocate gay bashing and even murder. Four Jamaican reggae singers, Beenie Man, Bounty Killer, Elephant Man, and Buju Banton have been the objects of protest in the United States and Europe over their homophobic lyrics.

Banton's "Boom Bye Bye" urges listeners to shoot gay men in the head, pour acid over them, and burn them alive, while Beenie Man's "Bad Man Chi Chi Man" (Bad Man, Queer Man) includes the lyrics: "If yuh nuh chi chi (queer) man wave yuh right hand and (NO!!!) / If yuh nuh lesbian wave yuh right hand and (NO!!!) / Some bwoy will go a jail fi kill man tun bad man chi chi man!!!. / Tell mi, sumfest it should a be a showdown / Yuh seem to run off a stage like a clown (Kill Dem DJ!!!)."

In the summer of 2004, British police opened a probe into whether these songs violate British hate laws, and protests and threats of boycotts led to the cancellation of concert appearances in the United States by Beenie Man.

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