



B - S I D E

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

With immense love and gratitude, we humbly introduce the 13th edition of The B-Side's print magazine. This issue is the cultivation of countless hours of hard work and determination from the brilliant minds of growing artists. The content of this magazine aims to highlight underrepresented voices, hidden histories, and narratives largely absent from mainstream journalism, as is The B-Side's mission statement with our content.

At a university like UC Berkeley, it's easy for arts students to feel alienated due to the overall STEM atmosphere running rampant. On top of that, some non-white and low-income art students feel even more disenfranchised once they see the majority of these organizations are run by students with a disconnect for their personal lived experiences, or they may stumble into organizations with high barriers of entry which are unable to be met due to the lack of resources in their pre-collegiate schooling. Prestige and elitism is just as large of a mascot at Berkeley as the Golden Bear, and we take great pride at The B-Side knowing we take the steps we can towards its hindrance.

This semester The B-Side has continued to grow as a powerful influence on campus and in the Berkeley community at large. During recruitment we strived for greater visibility and are currently operating with our largest staff to date. We have set new records for social media engagement (shout out to our TikTok team), and our content is reaching a larger audience than ever before. We are also very excited to announce the pending launch of our philanthropy department which will give back materially to the communities we aim to uplift with our content.

As a student organization that is financially independent from UC Berkeley, The B-Side relies entirely on our in-club resources to produce the magazine you hold in your hands. This is B-Side's largest and most diverse issue to date – the passion and motivation of our incredible writers and designers has enabled us to make this beautiful insightful magazine. We would like to extend the biggest thank you to our staff for making this issue possible, because without them, this organization would be nothing.

We recognize our attempts at de-colonization and anti-capitalism come from a position informed by privilege, especially at UC Berkeley. We recognize the imperfect and contradicting nature of the attempt at producing equitable journalism through an elite university. We recognize not every nuance will always be fully expressed. We recognize all of our staff, including us, are in an ongoing process of learning and unlearning. We recognize our staff members hold their own individual privileges and contribute to marginalization as well. The B-Side staff and content is not defined through perfect social activism, however – it is defined through its rigid attempt and through the critical emphasis applied upon social justice in our content. Social justice should not be an afterthought within journalism, it should be the piloting force behind your content and work, and The B-Side defines itself and operates with that understanding. We hope you enjoy reading and learning from the wonderful content in this magazine.

With love,
Sunny Sangha (they/them) and Lily Ramus (she/they)

Gaza's Wonder Boy

Underdog Mohammed Assaf Wins Arab Idol and Rises to Fame

I will not be authoring my real name in avoidance of Canary Mission, an organization which vilifies, blacklists and doxes Palestinians and Palestinian rights activists, typically college students, for speaking out against the settler state of Israel. The organization attacks individuals for spreading awareness on the Israeli apartheid and denouncing Israel's illegal occupation of historic Palestine. B-side will not hesitate to stand against settler colonialism and genocide.

In a land where children defend themselves by throwing pebbles at tanks, where holding the Palestinian flag is not only banned but met with violence, and where Israeli soldiers and settlers may break into your home at any moment and claim it as their own, is a land the world least expected the next winner of Arab Idol to come from.

Mohammed Assaf grew up with six siblings in the Khan Younis refugee camp in Gaza, a coastal Palestinian city that has remained under siege of Israeli forces for the past 15 years. Assaf lifted spirits with his voice at local events, weddings, and wherever else he could manage to sing. At 5 years old, Assaf's brother tells the Washington Post, he sang in honor of the late Yasser Arafat, the former leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. At 11, Assaf sang "Be Strong My Country" at the height of an Israeli invasion on Gaza. In the face of the countless hardships of living under a military occupation, apartheid, and ethnic cleansing, Assaf sings at any chance.

It was his intense and deeply personal relationship with music that inspired Assaf to audition for Arab Idol in 2013. The auditions were to take place in Cairo, so 22 year-old Assaf packed his bags alongside his dreams, and made his way to the Egyptian border. Mobility, though, is not easy for a Palestinian. Apart from frequent and invasive checkpoints within Israeli-occupied Palestine itself, entering and leaving borders as a Palestinian is a sizeable feat. Held up at the Rafah crossing of Egypt for two days, Assaf resorted to bribing the security to grant him access, but not without consequence.

He arrived at the recital hall late—the gate was closed, and no more tickets would be given out. Without a number pinned to his shirt, Assaf's singing would not be heard by the judges. Frustrated and disappointed, Assaf called his mother to break the bad news. Unphased, she demanded that Assaf not turn back now. "I always take [my parents'] advice, and I believe my mother's gut feeling is never, ever wrong," Assaf said in an interview with Enigma, and soon enough, it would ring true.

Naturally, Assaf did just as his mother said. Physically jumping over the fence that stood between him and his chance at an audition—and symbolically over the hurdles of being turned away at every opportunity—Assaf makes it into the audition hall. Still, without an audition number, his efforts would be pointless. In a fit of passionate desperation, Assaf does what is most natural to him, and begins singing in the waiting area beside the other contestants. Amongst them was a 19 year-old Palestinian contestant named Ramadan Adib Abu Nahel. Beyond impressed, Abu Nahel gave Assaf his audition number, and therefore his spot in the competition. The troubling journey would be worthwhile if it meant that he was able to perform. "[Assaf] hugged me and said, 'Thank you very much, I will never forget your favor,'" Abu Nahel told NPR. Palestinian solidarity is hard to come by when global superpowers and settler colonialism are pitted against you. Assaf nearly didn't get the chance to face the judges, but by the heartwarming compassion of a fellow Palestinian, he took the stage. Just like Abu Nahel,

محمد عساف

judges were stunned by Assaf. “You are a true singer,” says superstar judge Nancy Ajram to Assaf. Another judge described his skill to be “precise as a ruler,” and a third said Assaf’s voice “is made of diamond.” While the stern Simon Cowell doesn’t make an appearance on this spinoff of the Idol franchise, it’s likely that he too would grant his approval.

Assaf went on to sing gorgeous renditions, ranging from nationalistic Palestinian folk songs to The Backstreet Boys’ “I Want It That Way,” delivering vocal control and charisma each time. Maqamat in Arabic singing includes a system of scales and vocal techniques, which are notoriously difficult to master and vary by region, whose inflections and subtle tones may be difficult to spot for Western ears. Assaf effortlessly navigates these tonal maps, and all without ever taking professional music lessons, according to an interview with Enigma. As he sings with ease, it’s clear that music has always been second nature to Assaf, and the audience feels it too. It didn’t take long for the Arab world to be starstruck by Assaf, both for his talent and his dedication to his people. Assaf garnered unparalleled support from across the Arab world, and in Palestine, murals and posters of his smiling face were hung about. A local phone company, Jawwal, even cut the cost of texting rates to encourage voting for Assaf’s win.

A longtime friend tells the Washington Post, “he is the Palestinian dream.” For Palestinians, art and experience cannot be separated; when living under apartheid and genocide, even existing becomes a political act. “I cannot differentiate between my art and my patriotic attitude,” Assaf tells Palestinian Maan News Agency after singing in honor of a Palestinian hunger-striker. “I was living in harsh conditions all my life. The occupation, the siege, and the relentless oppression left me with feelings of hopelessness most of the time. But I’ve always fought against losing all hope,” Assaf tells Enigma magazine, and his advice to those like him—“Don’t give up when you get rejected. I was rejected about 7 million times.” His persistence is exactly what led him to win Arab Idol that season.

Falling to the floor to kneel in a prayer position, Assaf was a mixture of humble and incredulous upon hearing the results of the competition. His family and friends flooded the stage, enthusiastically lifting him on their shoulders and showering him in hugs and kisses. The celebration didn’t stop there, cheers erupted in major cities across the Arab world, with the sounds of car horns, fireworks and joy filling the air. In his hometown of Gaza, roads were entirely gridlocked, with fans standing on cars and dancing in the streets to Assaf’s music.

“This is the best thing that’s happened to Palestine since God knows when,” a witness told a CNN reporter, with crowds of cheering civilians behind him. A Palestinian flag draped around his neck like an Olympian and with trophy in hand, Assaf dedicated his win to the Palestinian people. As the winner of the show, he was then signed to Platinum records and went onto make one of the hallmark songs of Palestinian culture, “Dammi Falastini.” A beloved icon in Arab culture, Assaf was also made a goodwill ambassador for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). As he told Engima, “music is something that makes people come together, and I want to serve the Palestinian cause with my songs. I’ll keep doing that as long as I live.”

Mohammed Assaf is the epitome of Palestinian resilience, flourishing even under violent and systematic oppression. He makes art in the face of brutality, and against all odds. Assaf has brought pride to his family in the Khan Younis refugee camp of Gaza, and brings hope to the hopeless. As fan Widad Al-Khayyat tweeted, “Mohammed Assaf didn’t free #Palestine. But he brought joy to people who didn’t smile for the past 65 years of occupation.”



EAST BAY PUNK IS WHITE!

Written by
Sabrina Herrera
& Designed by
Siva Ing

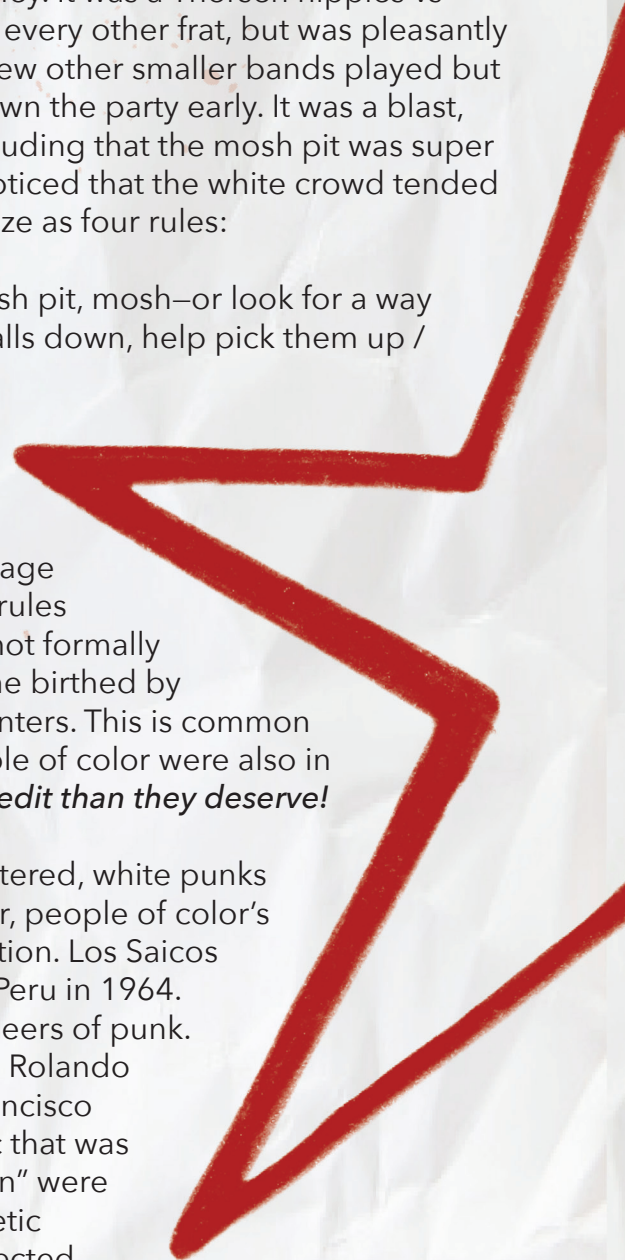
I still clearly remember the first house show I attended at Berkeley. It was a Thorsen hippies vs punks themed party. I was expecting music from a speaker like every other frat, but was pleasantly surprised when Berkeley native Small Crush took the stage. A few other smaller bands played but ultimately we did not hear much from them as the pigs shut down the party early. It was a blast, but I do remember reflecting with some friends after and concluding that the mosh pit was super white! Though typically this isn't much of a problem, we also noticed that the white crowd tended to ignore pit etiquette, which lawyers Arnold and Itkin summarize as four rules:

1. Treat others as you wish to be treated /
2. If you're in the mosh pit, mosh—or look for a way out. If you're not in the mosh pit, don't mosh. /
3. If someone falls down, help pick them up /
- and 4. Moshing is an opt-in activity aka requires consent!

Every other show in Berkeley I've gone to has been similar, boasting a very white, male audience who does not look out for anyone! To understand this problem, we need to talk about punk rock as a genre. Punk originated as a result of the 60s garage rock scene (think the Kinks and Rolling Stones). There were no rules to this anti-establishment music, and typically the bands were not formally trained. In the 1970s, punk rock came to New York City, its scene birthed by bands like the Ramones. New York and London were the epicenters. This is common knowledge, but there's a major aspect we do not hear of: people of color were also in the scene. *We are giving Latinx Punk and Afro-Punk way less credit than they deserve!*

Though punk as a genre is very women, BIPOC, and queer centered, white punks have been the face of the genre for most of its history. However, people of color's importance in the genre has recently achieved greater recognition. Los Saicos are an especially important garage rock band formed in Lima, Peru in 1964. You may have never heard of them, but Los Saicos are the pioneers of punk. Though the band was together for only about a year, members Rolando "El Chino" Carpio, Erwin Flores, César "Papi" Castrillón, and Francisco "Pancho" Guevara made noisy, passionate and energetic music that was unlike anything in the world. Their songs "Ana" and "Demolicion" were important in solidifying garage rock, with its pure noise, energetic sound, and eccentric lyrics. A barrier worth mentioning that affected Los Saicos and other Latin Americans bands was the cost of vinyl. In Latin America, vinyl was very expensive; only a few could afford to own them. Punk being so white-centered is a lot of the time due to factors like this. That was until the cassette player, which bands like Los Saicos took advantage of.

Latinx punk from L.A. also played a huge part in establishing the punk sound, which is



characterized by non-conformity, anti-authoritarianism, and anti-corporatism and has served as inspiration for many of your favorite punk bands. The Brat is especially notable for this. They were a Chicano punk band fronted by Teresa Covarrubias in the late 1970s.

Like many other Chicano punk bands at the time, their lyrics were

focused on them feeling like outsiders. However, there were several venues in East L.A. such as the Vex, which was very big for Chicano performers at the time. Unless you are in the East L.A. punk scene, it's likely you have never heard of the Vex, or even the Brat. The East Bay lacks spaces like these for Latinx punks.

Afro-punk is talked about even less by the average punk fan, and there has not been much written about it either. Afropunk directed by James Spooner was the only information about Black punks that I could find that has seeped into mainstream media. The documentary focuses on both Black punk bands and Black punk fans, and the struggles that come with the stereotypes of being punks. Black punk bands began emerging in the late 70s and early 80s. They included bands like Bad

Brains and Pure Hell. Though showing up to the scene later than some of the previously mentioned bands, they still majorly impacted many of the punk bands today and brought a new energy. They were some of the first to

incorporate things like funk, soul, and reggae into their hardcore music with songs like "Banned in D.C." that have lyrics like "We, we've got ourselves.." emphasizing the community that makes up Black punks and punk in general; solidarity and camaraderie is the main point of punk.

Community was more important in POC punk spaces, as being a person of color in the predominantly white punk scene can be an isolating experience. This is where the East Bay comes into play.

A Brief History of East Bay Punk

It is impossible to talk about East Bay punk without mentioning 924 Gilman Street, the DIY-style venue in Berkeley that birthed bands such as Operation Ivy and Green Day. 924 Gilman Street cared about the bands and the audience—it promoted true punk values and community. That

being said, the East Bay is pretty white historically. One in 10 Bay area Neighborhoods are segregated areas of white wealth according to the Bay Area Equity Atlas. According to the study, "A look at the demographics of these neighborhoods of concentrated white wealth reveals the extent to which low-income Black, Latinx, and AAPI households are excluded from wealthy white enclaves compared with their white counterparts." There is a clear correlation between areas of poverty, POC households, and availability of instruments and formal training. The latter factors are more easily available to white people living in affluent suburbs with a disposable income. A big part of punk is the DIY factor, but in the East Bay the disparities are so

grave that having access to instruments in the first place is almost impossible. White bands are able to start a band on a whim most of the time, and I think the East Bay area has a lot of such punk bands.

A majority of Berkeley house shows are still dominated by white-centered bands. Recently there has been an influx of bands with POC members such as Dogs Need God, Sex Asians, and Swell Foop. Still, the audiences at these shows and a majority of the bands that play at 924 Gilman Street are white. White dominated spaces are intimidating for POC not only to enter but also to want to be a part of, even if they feel passionate about the music or the punk community in general.

What Can We do to Exalt POC Punks:

Right now going out to shows at 924 Gilman, Eli's Mile High Club, and Bottom of the Hill are great ways to support POC punks and their future endeavors. As for house shows, making it a point to be inclusive and seek out new bands that are fronted by POC is important.

Community is a special thing, especially in the punk scene—the East Bay being white-dominated and lacking spaces for Latinx and Black punks and bands is very disappointing. In low-income areas, children should have the opportunity to learn how to play an instrument. Supporting organizations like the Bay Area Music Project and those similar to it is also important to ensure a more inclusive and welcoming punk scene later down the line.



mean something

Written by Anoushka Ghosh

Design by Savannah Rice

hi, she texts
on tumblr of all things.
i was 14.

she texts me she loves abel.
tesfaye, i mean.
but i was quite unable
to pretend we, us, didn't mean anything.

and so i listened to him,
to the Trilogy of albums that became the
background
of me trying to impress her,
of becoming a sum of the things she
loved.

i am nothing but a collection of
what i borrowed from her.

she tells me about j. cole,
But I wanna see that crooked smile,
he croons.
the gap tooth i had
peeked through when she played it.

i don't have my gap tooth anymore,
but i do have this—
a memory.

it's 2 am
and we are oversaturated
on being
Frank with each other
These bitches want Nikes,
and then we both hear

but i'll mean something to
you,
she did
mean
something
to
me.



When Words Fail: Middle Eastern Grief in Music

Written by Yara Hoeb & Designed by Savannah Rice

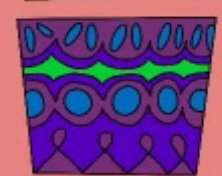
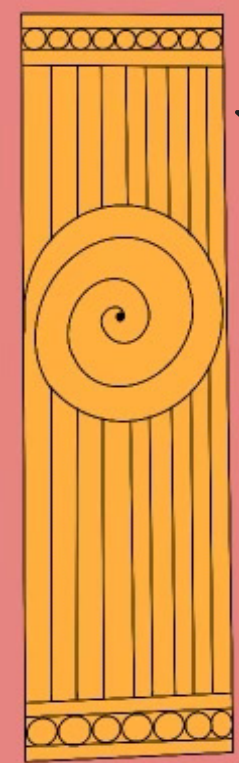
It's July of 2011 and I'm 8 years old. Settled in the gray area between the second and the third grade, my summer days are spent reading upside down with my feet in the air and playing soccer religiously. My mornings however, take on a different tone. Yawning as I walk out of my childhood bedroom, the comforting aroma of warmed, almost-burnt pita bread escapes from the kitchen stove. This isn't new. A ritual of sorts, the smell of bread wafting from the kitchen only precedes the hot black tea I know is soon to come. Food occupies my thoughts as I turn into the well-lit kitchen area, and my ears perk up a little as I hear the familiar voice of the celebrated Lebanese singer, Fairuz, interlocked with the voice of another. My Syrian mother harmonizes with her, eyes closed as she sways back and forth with the instrumental.

Together, my mom and Fairuz sing, "Atfa'at Madeenati Qendeelaha/ Aghlaqat Babaha/ Asbahat Fi-l-Masa/ Wahdaha Wahdaha Wa-Layla." Translation: "My city has turned off her lamp/ She shut her doors/ She has become alone in the evening/ Alone in the night."

Observing the scene, 8-year-old me is accustomed to hearing the guttural, smooth tones in Fairuz's music. She is not, however, accustomed to the pained expression which occupies her mother's face today. Nor does she seem to understand the lyrical intricacies and implications of the somber song which break the morning silence. More importantly, she doesn't know it all has to do with a war that has just begun six thousand miles away in her mother's homeland—her homeland—where she only visited once the summer before. A soon-to-be third-grader, I continue the early years of my life. The Syrian Civil War enters its early stages.

Eleven years later. The Syrian Civil War still continues. It's May of 2022 and I'm almost 19 years old, home for the summer after just finishing my first year of college. Like I've always done, I begin my mornings by walking clumsily towards my kitchen. This particular morning I'm a little more disheveled than usual. Eyes half-open with my hair in a frizzy knot, I stroll towards an empty kitchen. Unsurprisingly though, I see the backyard screen door is propped open immediately beside the kitchen. Blessed with a green thumb and a knack for gardening I'll never have, my mother is expectedly only a small ways past the screen door, tending to her growing pomegranate tree. Spotting her, I walk purposefully towards the grape vine-lined black gazebo in my backyard, hoping to spend some time relaxing and reclining in a chair before the morning breeze transitions into afternoon heat. Before I'm able to sit down though, varying greens and yellows greet my eyes as trees and flowers in my garden come into view. Taking it all in for a second, I lower myself slowly into a chair and prop my feet on the table in the middle of the chairs. While being so immersed in my surroundings, I didn't seem to realize a tune was playing from my mom's iPhone only an arms-reach away.

Fairuz croons, "Sa-Narj'iu, Khabbarani-l-Andeleeb Ghadata Eltaqyna Munhana/ Bi-Anna-l-Balabila Lamma Tazal Hunaka Ta'eeshu Bi-Ash'arina/ Wa-Ma Zal Bayna Tilali-l-Haneen W-Nasu-l-Haneen Makanon Lana/ Faya Qulbu Kam Sharradatna Riyah / Ta'ala Sa-Narj'iu." Translation: "We will be back, the



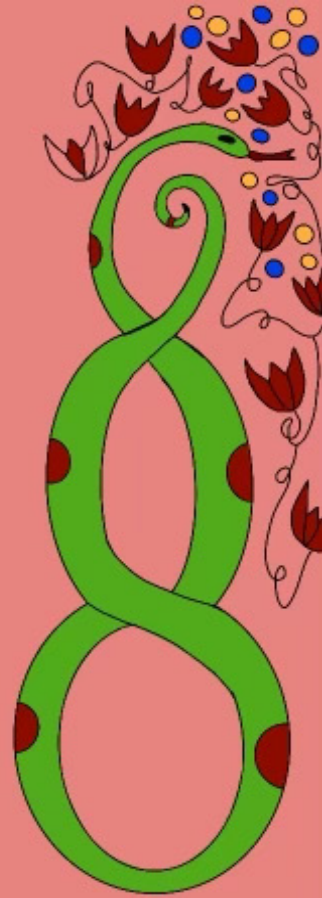
nightingale told me when we met on a hill/ Bulbuls still live there on our poems/ And that among the yearning hills and people, there is a place for us/ So my heart, how long then has the wind scattered us/ Come back, let us return”

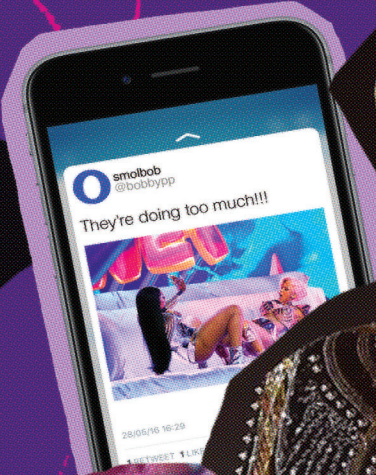
Listening intently, 19 year-old me realizes— I can actually understand the details of Fairuz’s lyrics unlike years past. Funny enough, the language requirement I had failed to fulfill in high school left me with no choice but to take two Arabic language courses in university. As a result, I found myself falling back in love with my culture and the music of my childhood. In particular, the songs of Fairuz, the only artist I listened to consistently growing up, began to take on new meanings for me. Armed with new understandings of a language I was mere acquaintances with before, I began to recognize many of my past misinterpretations of Arabic songs in my childhood. I discovered most of the lyrics I heard in my house growing up had been lost in translation, their meanings diluted when crossing language barriers from Arabic into English.

Through this process of reforming my judgments of the music I grew up with, I made realizations about Fairuz and her impact on the Arab world. Namely, it became clear to me Fairuz, born in Lebanon during the 1950s, is really a representation of a war-torn generation. Centered on the watan, or the homeland, many of her ballads exist as love letters to her people and her country. As such, they touch on themes of betrayal, resentment, and loss— but also the hope of yearning for a brighter future. As violence in the Middle East continues, these songs have carried and united broken people through the shared experience of watching their homelands wither away through war. The heartfelt lyrics and somber tones of songs like “Le Beirut,” “Sanargea Youman,” and “Watani” provide comfort to many, echoing the sorrows of people who are all too familiar with loss and pain on a large scale. The music takes you on a journey, Fairuz holding you down in a tender way as she airs out shared grievances only to then embrace listeners in a mantra of boundless love for the motherland.

In my own life, I have known Fairuz’s music to be a consoling force for my Syrian family members and friends throughout the ongoing Civil War. These songs have become more than music to me, rooting themselves in various parts of my everyday life. Fairuz’s voice has soothed and provoked me, saddened and uplifted me. It has presented itself to me in all contexts, whether in the dark of the night or the early hours of the morning, at home or far away. I’ve listened to “Watani” after hearing news of the daily bombings in and around my parent’s hometown of As-Swayda in Syria, I’ve walked down Telegraph playing “Zahrat al-Mada’èn,” mourning the loss of yet another Palestinian child murdered by the Israeli Defense Forces, and most frequently, I’ve listened to songs like “Le Beirut” almost ritually to start my mornings, swaying back and forth to the instrumental with tea in my hand. Even in the years where I could not yet fully grasp Fairuz’s lyricism, her voice alone had healing powers, bridging the gap between me and the culture I didn’t fully understand yet.

In a world where Middle Eastern people watch as more and more destruction ensues in their homeland, the music has allowed for a space where people can grieve collectively. Where words fail, Fairuz puts lyrics and a melody to the feelings of hopelessness and desperation that Arab-identifying people often can’t express otherwise. We, as Middle Eastern people, are able to confront our fears through these songs, expressing our feelings of love for and loss of our people and our homelands. To put it short, Fairuz’s music is about more than just one singer and her legacy, it is a lifeline. Fairuz’s songs are about understanding one another and creating a space where Middle Eastern people can breathe as one, working to heal the emotional wounds of war which permeate the lives of too many.





"THEY'RE DOING TOO MUCH"

OR ARE THEY?

Written by Andrew Zendejas &
Designed by Izzy Davies

"Beyoncé is overrated."

"Megan's songs all sound the same."

"Chlöe does too much."

Women of color within the music industry have had to hustle exponentially harder in order to stay within the spotlight and be viewed as equals to their male counterparts. Yet, even after they expressed stardom that essentially redefined music as an artform, comments criticizing them continue to pour in.

Criticisms meant to discredit the work and artistry of women within the music industry have become all too common across Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. One critique in particular that seems to be applied and reapplied to women in the industry is the accusation they "do too much." But the question is, are these women actually "doing too much" as their critics claim or have we as consumers of music just become too accustomed to works of white mediocrity?

During the 90s and 2000s era of music, when CD's, iTunes, and iPod Nanos defined the music scene, artists, particularly artists of color, would release music in eras that would allow their fans to fully immerse themselves into the world created by the music. The music videos and live performances of music were like no other because in order to stay within the spotlight, these artists had to give everything, including intricate choreography, vocal range, and a knack for capturing attention. This era of music marked an age of performance and overall stardom. When we look back at stars like Aaliyah, Destiny's Child (Kelly Rowland, Beyoncé, and Michelle Williams), Janet Jackson, Brandy, TLC, and Mariah Carey, we see how they all commanded attention on the stage because they were performers who actually encapsulated all aspects of music in order to make their impact on pop culture. In today's contexts, they likely would have been met with the same "doing too much" criticisms that the new pop and R&B girls face.

Now, in our age of streaming, performing as an art form has dwindled in favor of a much simpler, and arguably mediocre style of performance in which artists may sing and occasionally jump around the stage. Obviously, the criticism of the new performance style does not apply to artists like Adele, Mitski, and artists with sadder, emotional tones within their music because they're not expected to have intricate choreography while they're belting their heart out to their most gut-wrenching songs. Instead, the mediocrity in performance style becomes an issue when white, male-identifying artists in Pop and R&B, genres with a historical precedent of intricate performances, are revered for their work while women in the same field are criticized for exceeding all bars set by their male colleagues.

In recent years the music industry has considered Shawn Mendes and Ed Sheeran to be some of their so-called “princes of pop.” Mendes and Sheeran are both white, male singers whose performances are typically limited to a guitar-in-hand performance meant to highlight their vocals and lyricism rather than putting on a cohesive performance as a whole. These men are celebrated by their audiences and meet little to no criticisms regarding their craft despite comparatively mediocre performances to female artists in the same genre. The general public’s main critique of Ed Sheeran is his appearance and Shawn Mendes doesn’t get many critiques aside from some cruel jokes about his sexuality. These white male artists aren’t met with the same criticisms because they aren’t held to the same standards as women of color within the music industry.

Meanwhile, women at the top of their fields who have set the bar for performances and artistry, are met with an extensive amount of critiques that claim they are doing too much, that they can’t sing, and/or that all their songs sound the same. What’s surprising is that comments tearing down women for those factors which makes their performances special will be mentioned in the same breath that people praise the princes of pop for their white mediocrity. The reason for the discrepancy between praise for white mediocrity and the criticism of black, female artistry is simply put: racism and misogyny.

Audiences have become too accustomed to being satisfied with mediocre performances from their favorite white artists so in retaliation they become defensive when an artist shows up on the scene and explicitly shows what the fan-base is missing out on. When new artists like Chlöe, Megan Thee Stallion, and Normani tap into the 90s and 2000s influences which they grew up with, that full-out performing they do gets reduced to critiques of women “doing too much,” “trying too hard,” and “being overrated.”

The rollout for Chloe Bailey’s solo music has been a prime example of this phenomenon. Even before her solo debut with her single “Have Mercy,” Chlöe had covered Nina Simone’s “Feeling Good” in an artistic approach that some Twitter users thought was disgraceful due to the sexy tone of voice and choreography. She had faced immense backlash in her first solo venture without her sister Halle Bailey, even though the performance was the highlight of the night. The comments could have put out her light before it could even begin to burn by dissuading her from continuing on with her solo work. Luckily she and fans alike were able to look at the silver lining-Chlöe had been majorly trending across social media platforms and now attention would be directed her way (in perfect timing for her new era.) She ignored the hate and continued to work towards the release of her debut album with no compromises to her authentic self or her art that may be “too much” for audiences used to mediocre content.

Chlöe came hot out the gate with her single “Have Mercy” which had accompanied videos and performances

with a clear aesthetic, choreography, and theme that set a precedent for the rest of her album rollout; the album was going to be about embracing sexuality and nothing but “bad b*tch energy.” Twitter continued making think-pieces that would have her name trending nearly every time she so much as posted a picture on Instagram claiming she was “trying too hard”, “doing too much,” or “oversexualizing herself,” but Chlöe will end up getting the last laugh as she gears up to finally release her solo album to the public. Chloe’s work was nothing but impeccable and she quite literally put in blood, sweat, and tears into the content she put out. As an artist signed to Columbia Records and Parkwood Entertainment, she lived up to the expectations set for her but her continued criticisms are an attack on her femininity and a response to Chloe claiming power in her embracement of sexuality—a trademark critique directed towards female artists. If only she were another generic white man singing yet again about his love for his girlfriend while strumming a guitar she might avoid hate directed her way. But she’s not, and that’s why the public is making her pay the unnecessary price for being an exceptional performer, singer, producer, actress, and more as a multi-talented Black woman.

Racism has made it so that fanatic audiences of mediocrity criticize up-and-coming artists of color who outwork their favorites on the stage. The criticisms do not stop at the up-and-coming artists though. Racism and misogyny have long been used to attack established women of color who have created empires out of their art. Beyoncé has established herself as one of the greatest performers of all time. She quite literally changed the digital release date from Tuesdays to Fridays with the surprise release of her self-titled album Beyoncé and set the bar for performances with Homecoming at Coachella in 2018. Despite having done the performance of all performances, consistently creating top-tier visuals for albums, and releasing record-breaking art, Queen Bey has and continues to receive backlash for doing too much and being overrated. Since the moment she stepped foot on the scene as a part of Destiny’s Child, she has been met with backlash for doing what needed to be done to become a superstar. People even resorted to conspiracies that claimed she worked with the Illuminati to achieve her success; the only effect these conspiracies achieved in reality was in diminishing the work of a female artist of color. Beyoncé continues to ignore the hate in favor of the love she gets for being a living legend. Still, the critiques directed towards women of color persist as an attempt to discredit their accomplishments.

Women of color within the music industry aren’t doing too much, white, mediocre artists are just not doing enough. Exceptionalism is a threat to mediocrity, and that is why these women of color are coming under fire for their talent.

Hillbilly History

The Black Roots of Country Music and Its White Co-optation

Written by Kalina Godorov and Designed by Layne Werle

MUSIC UNLOCKS OUR IMAGINATION—WE MIGHT ENVISION A CLOSE FRIEND, THINK OF A MEMORY, OR SMELL THE SETTING IN WHICH WE FIRST HEARD A SONG. OUR MENTAL INVOCATION OF MUSIC HAS NO BOUNDARIES: WE INVOLVE ALL OUR SENSES TO CONSTRUCT OUR SENTIMENT OF A SONG, ALBUM, OR EVEN GENRE. I INVITE YOU TO IMAGINE ONE: COUNTRY MUSIC. WHAT COMES TO MIND? MAYBE YOU HEAR THE IGNITION OF AN AGED PICKUP TRUCK OR CHATTER BETWEEN SOME HILLBILLY DRAWLS; THE SMELL OF YOUR GRANDPA’S BREATH MUDDLED WITH TOBACCO-SMOKE OR YOUR AUNTIE’S HEAVY-HANDED FLORAL PERFUME; THE IMAGE OF DIRTY COWBOY BOOTS OR A BOTTLE OF JACK DANIEL’S. OR PERHAPS YOU HEAR A GUTTURAL SLUR-WOVEN REMARK OR ENVISION A NEIGHBORHOOD ENGULFED BY CONFEDERATE MEMORABILIA.

FROM THESE IMAGES, WHAT DO YOU FEEL? PERHAPS A SENSE OF SOLITUDE, LONGING, AND NOSTALGIA; PERHAPS RESENTMENT, ANGUISH, AND FEAR. FOR MANY, THE IMAGE OF COUNTRY MUSIC EITHER LEAVES A SWEET OR BITTER TASTE IN THE MOUTH, OFTEN ENGRAVED WITH ARCHETYPAL ETCHINGS OF RURAL AMERICA AND ITS DIVISIVENESS.

THE MISSING DESCRIPTOR (THAT YOU’VE SURELY CONCLUDED) OF RURALITY IS WHITE. THROUGH ITS ACOUSTIC RHYTHMS AND LYRICAL MOTIFS OF MANUAL LABOR, SMALL TOWNS, AND DEVOTION TO GOD, COUNTRY MUSIC IN ITS CONTEMPORARY FORM SERVES AS A HALLMARK FOR AMERICAN CONSERVATISM, PATRIARCHY, AND IMPORTANTLY, WHITE SUPREMACY.

HOWEVER, THIS WASN’T ALWAYS THE CASE. DIVERSE STYLES OF FOLK MUSIC HAVE LONG EMERGED AND EVOLVED INTERGENERATIONALLY IN REFLECTION OF THEIR ORIGINAL COMMUNITIES. THE DEVELOPMENT OF COUNTRY MUSIC IN THE UNITED STATES, HOWEVER, HAS BRANCHED INTO A DISTINCTLY RACIALIZED GENRE THAT HARDLY REPRESENTS ITS EARLIER COUNTERPARTS. SO, WHAT MAKES MODERN COUNTRY MUSIC SO WHITE? TO UNPACK THE RACIAL POLITICS OF THE GENRE, WE FIRST HAVE TO LOOK AT ITS BACKGROUND.

FOLK, COUNTRY, AND WESTERN MUSIC, IN ITS EARLY STAGES, HAD ANCESTRY CHIEFLY IN CELTIC BALLADS AND SOUTHERN BLUES. THE “FOLKINESS” OF THE GENRE (AND INSTRUMENTS LIKE THE FIDDLE) IS LARGELY MOLDED BY CELTIC MUSICAL STYLES, WHICH TRAVELED TO NORTH AMERICA ALONGSIDE SETTLERS FROM NORTHWESTERN EUROPE.

ON THE OTHER HAND, THE PARAMOUNT INFLUENCE OF SOUTHERN BLUES STEMMED FAR FROM EUROPE. ORIGINATING IN THE ANTEBELLUM-ERA DEEP SOUTH, THE BLUES BLOSSOMED IN THE 1860S THROUGH THE INNOVATION, INSTRUMENTALISM, AND STORYTELLING OF BLACK FOLKS—NAMESLY, THOSE WHO WERE FORMERLY-ENSLAVED AND THEIR IMMEDIATE DESCENDENTS. THE

SOCIOPOLITICAL UNDERSCORE OF THE POST-CIVIL WAR SOUTH IS INVETERATE IN ITS MUSICAL FORM. MANY INSTRUMENTS THAT HAVE BECOME ASSOCIATED WITH THE GENRE, SUCH AS THE BANJO, WERE PIONEERED BY ENSLAVED BLACK AMERICANS AND INFLUENCED BY WEST AFRICAN STRING INSTRUMENTS. FURTHERMORE, THE BLUES BUILDS ON ELEMENTS OF BLACK SPIRITUALS, LABOR SONGS, AND CALL-AND-RESPONSE PATTERNS, MAKING THE GENRE HOLISTICALLY AND INEXTRICABLY DERIVED FROM THE BLACK EXPERIENCE DURING AND POST ENSLAVEMENT.

TO UNDERSTAND HOW COUNTRY MUSIC WAS CO-OPTED AS THE ANTHEM OF CONSERVATIVE WHITE AMERICA, WE NEED TO RECOGNIZE CERTAIN STEPS IN ITS EVOLUTION. LET'S RECAP THE SIX MAIN STAGES:

FIRST GENERATION (1920s-1930s): EARLY COUNTRY STYLE MUSIC FIRST EMERGES. WE HEAR ROBUST INSTRUMENTATION AND A STRONG CONTINUING INFLUENCE OF THE BLUES. THE BLUES AND MANY OF ITS SUBGENRES (E.G., BOOGIE-WOOGIE, COUNTRY BLUES, URBAN BLUES) GAIN POPULARITY. WE SEE STRONG RACIAL CATEGORIZATION WITHIN THE EARLY RECORDED MUSIC INDUSTRY: "HILLBILLY MUSIC" IS MARKETED TO RURAL WHITES, WHILE "RACE RECORDS" ARE MARKETED TO AFRICAN-AMERICANS.

NOTABLY: FIDDLIN' JOHN CARSON AND RILEY PUCKETT (OLD-TIME), JIMMIE RODGERS ("FATHER OF COUNTRY MUSIC"), W. C. HANDY ("FATHER OF THE BLUES"), CHARLEY PATTON ("FATHER OF THE DELTA BLUES"), BLIND LEMON JEFFERSON ("FATHER OF THE TEXAS BLUES"), MEADE LUX LEWIS (BOOGIE-WOOGIE), THE CARTER FAMILY.

SECOND GENERATION (1930s-40s): THE GENRE RISES IN POPULARITY AND SPREADS THROUGHOUT THE NATION. THE HILLBILLY OR "HONKY-TONK" SOUND BECOMES WELL ESTABLISHED. THE "COWBOY" OR "WESTERN" ASSOCIATIONS BECOME PROMINENT THROUGH THE MUSIC'S USE IN SOUNDTRACKS. WHILE WE COULD GO INTO THE NON-WHITE ORIGINS OF COWBOYS, THIS TOPIC DESERVES ITS OWN SPREAD.

NOTABLY: FLOYD TILLMAN (WESTERN SWING/ HONKY-TONK), ERNEST TUBB, HANK WILLIAMS (HONKY-TONK), GENE AUTRY (WESTERN), THE GRAND OLE OPRY.

THIRD GENERATION (1950s-60s): AFTER THE END OF WWII, NEW SUBGENRES EMERGE. WE HEAR STYLES SUCH AS BLUEGRASS, "FRONTIER" MUSIC, AND ROCKABILLY. THE "NASHVILLE SOUND" DOMINATES COUNTRY MUSIC DURING THE LATE 1950S WITH A SMOOTH, COMMERCIAL APPEAL, THOUGH ITS POPULARITY IS CHALLENGED BY THE EMERGENCE OF THE ROCK-INFUSED "BAKERSFIELD SOUND" IN THE LATE 1960S.

NOTABLY: BILL MONROE (THE



“FATHER OF BLUEGRASS”), OWEN BRADLEY, PATSY CLINE, AND JIM REEVES (NASHVILLE SOUND), KITTY WELLS (NASHVILLE SOUND/HONKY-TONK), MERLE HAGGARD (BAKERSFIELD SOUND), ELVIS PRESLEY (ROCKABILLY), JOHNNY CASH (ROCKABILLY/OUTLAW), PORTER WAGONER.

FOURTH GENERATION (1970s-80s): THIS TIME IS PIVOTAL IN THE GENRE’S DEVELOPMENT AND ITS SHIFT TOWARDS WHITENESS. WE SEE A STRUGGLE BETWEEN TRADITION AND INNOVATION. NASHVILLE SOUND MORPHS INTO “COUNTRYPOLITAN,” WITH A POP-INFUSED SOUND THAT REACHES MAINSTREAM SUCCESS IN THE LATE 1960S INTO THE 1970S. COUNTERCULTURE SOUNDS OF THE 1970S INCLUDE PROGRESSIVE COUNTRY, “OUTLAW” COUNTRY, AND “BACK-TO-BASICS” MOVEMENTS. IN THE “NEO-TRADITIONAL” MOVEMENT OF THE 1980S, WE HEAR A REVIVAL OF EARLIER COUNTRY STYLES AND GREATER INFLUENCES OF POP AND ROCK. THIS FUSION LEADS TO A BOOM IN MASS POPULARITY AND UNMATCHED COMMERCIAL SUCCESS.

NOTABLY: CHET ATKINS (NASHVILLE SOUND/COUNTRYPOLITAN), BILLY SHERRILL, CHARLEY PRIDE (COUNTRYPOLITAN), TAMMY WYNETTE (COUNTRYPOLITAN/“FIRST LADY OF COUNTRY MUSIC”), WILLIE NELSON, WAYLON JENNINGS (OUTLAW), RICKY SKAGGS (NEO-TRADITIONAL).

AS AN INDICATOR, BETWEEN 1961-1979, THE NUMBER OF FULL-TIME COUNTRY MUSIC RADIO STATIONS ROSE FROM 81 TO 1,434. DURING THIS TIME PERIOD WE SEE WOMEN BEGINNING TO TAKE MAJOR ROLES IN THE GENRE. WHILE THE RISE OF WOMEN (AND CERTAIN PROGRESSIVE THEMES) CHALLENGE THE MALE-DOMINATED STATUS-QUO, THE GENRE IS NOWHERE NEAR INCLUSIVE.

OVERALL, COUNTRY MUSIC’S COMMERCIAL SUCCESS IN THE CONTEXT OF RAMPANT CULTURAL-SEGREGATION IN 20TH CENTURY AMERICA MEANT THE ERASURE OF BLACK MUSICIANS AND CONTRIBUTIONS. I’LL TOUCH MORE ON THIS LATER.

FIFTH GENERATION (1990s): COUNTRY MUSIC FLOURISHES IN MAINSTREAM POPULARITY. THE EXPANSION OF FM RADIO INCREASES THE REACH AND FIDELITY OF COUNTRY MUSIC STATIONS. IN 1990, BILLBOARD MAGAZINE BEGINS COMPILING ITS COUNTRY MUSIC CHART BASED ENTIRELY ON RADIO AIRPLAY. WE HEAR A STRONG RESURGENCE OF COUNTRY POP. THE POPULARIZATION OF LINE DANCING EXPANDS COUNTRY MUSIC’S MAINSTREAM SUCCESS.

NOTABLY: GEORGE STRAIT (NEO-TRADITIONAL/“KING OF COUNTRY”), PATTY LOVELESS, CLINT BLACK, GARTH BROOKS, ALAN JACKSON, TIM MCGRAW, FAITH HILL, REBA MCENTIRE, SHANIA TWAIN, BILLY RAY CYRUS.

SIXTH GENERATION (2000s-TODAY*): AN EXTREMELY PIVOTAL PERIOD IN THE SHIFT TOWARDS WHITENESS. WE HEAR GREATER ROCK AND R&B INFLUENCE. MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE ATTACKS ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 DISTINCTLY SHAPE THE FUTURE OF COUNTRY MUSIC. MUSIC SERVES AS A REFLECTION OF PROMINENT CULTURAL-POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES OF THE NATION. THE 9/11 ATTACKS FOSTER JINGOIST, XENOPHOBIC, AND WHITE-SUPREMACIST RHETORIC THAT UBIQUITOUSLY TRANSLATES INTO EARLY-2000S COUNTRY MUSIC AND CONSOLIDATES WHITE DOMINATION OF THE GENRE. EXTREME PATRIOTISM, AMERICAN FLAG SYMBOLISM, AND SURVIVAL MOTIFS BECOME CENTRAL. WE SEE SONG TITLES INCLUDING “WHERE THE STARS AND STRIPES AND THE EAGLE FLY,” “ONLY IN AMERICA,” “AMERICA WILL ALWAYS STAND,” AND “AMERICA WILL SURVIVE.” IN THE 2010S, WE HEAR GREATER GENRE-CROSSING FROM COUNTRY, POP, AND R&B ARTISTS. CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF COUNTRY MUSIC REACH WIDER AUDIENCES AND GAIN COMMERCIAL SUCCESS. NOTABLY: BROOKS & DUNN, CARRIE UNDERWOOD, DARIUS RUCKER, KACEY MUSGRAVES, MIRANDA LAMBERT, MORGAN WALLEN, FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE, TAYLOR SWIFT, LIL NAS X.

WHILE WE HAVE DISCUSSED THE UNDENIABLE BLACK ROOTS AND THE EVOLUTION OF COUNTRY MUSIC OVER THE YEARS, WHAT DIFFERENTIATES A NATURAL DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION FROM A SUPPOSED APPROPRIATION AND CO-OPTATION? PRIMARILY, THIS SHIFT DID NOT BRIDGE OR BREAK BARRIERS BUT RATHER BUTTRESSED AND ARMED A SPACE—WITH WEAPONS OF EXCLUSION AND ERASURE—TO BECOME A SYMBOL OF WHITE AMERICAN IDENTITY.

AS WITH OTHER FORMS OF CULTURAL APPROPRIATION, THE GENRE HAS CONSISTENTLY ERASED AND MARGINALIZED BLACK FOLKS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS. DELIBERATE MARKETING TACTICS AND GENRE CATEGORIES CREATED BY (WHITE-DOMINATED) RECORD COMPANIES AND RADIO STATIONS FORTIFIED THE CULTURAL SEGREGATION OF MUSIC. COUNTRY MUSIC, ALONGSIDE BEING OVERTAKEN BY WHITE ARTISTS, WAS MARKETED AS A REFLECTION OF WHITE IDENTITY (AS “REAL” [WHITE] AMERICAN MUSIC, FOR [WHITE] EVERYDAY FOLKS, REPRESENTING [WHITE] RURAL AMERICA).

DEBATES OF APPROPRIATION AND CULTURAL OWNERSHIP OF MUSIC STYLES ARE VITAL AND MULTIFACETED. WHILE MANY WHITE MUSICIANS HAVE INNOVATED AND SHAPED COUNTRY MUSIC, THE GENRE IS THEMATICALLY AND MUSICALLY ROOTED IN THE BLACK AMERICAN EXPERIENCE—WITHOUT DUE RECOGNITION.

NOTABLE ARTISTS, SUCH AS JIMMIE RODGERS (KNOWN AS THE “FATHER OF COUNTRY MUSIC”) WERE STRONGLY INFLUENCED BY AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTISTS; HANK WILLIAMS DIRECTLY LEARNED FROM BLACK MUSICIANS; BLACK GUITARIST LESLEY RIDDLE AIDED THE CARTER FAMILY’S RISE TO FAME; ARNOLD SCHULTZ, A BLACK FIDDLER, PAVED THE WAY FOR THE SUCCESS OF BILL MONROE (KNOWN AS THE “FATHER OF BLUEGRASS”) AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF BLUEGRASS STYLE, AND MANY OTHER SUCCESSFUL WHITE COUNTRY ARTISTS DIRECTLY AND INDIRECTLY BUILT CAREERS OFF THE WORK OF BLACK MUSICIANS WHO REMAINED LARGELY UNCREDITED. ARTISTS SUCH AS MA RAINEY, MAMIE SMITH, BIG MAMA THORNTON, SKIP JAMES, CHARLEY PATTON, ROBERT JOHNSON, AND GEORGIA TOM DORSEY LAID THE FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE ACCLAIM OF COUNTRY MUSIC, THOUGH SELDOM RECEIVED A FRACTION OF THE SUCCESS OR RECOGNITION AS DID THEIR WHITE COUNTERPARTS AND SUCCESSORS.

IN ORDER TO DESTIGMATIZE AND COUNTERACT THE ILL-FEELINGS THAT MANY HOLD TOWARDS COUNTRY MUSIC, IT’S VITAL THAT WE LEARN AND SHARE KNOWLEDGE OF THE HISTORICALLY MARGINALIZED ARTISTS AND SUPPORT EMERGING BIPOC ARTISTS WITHIN THE WHITE-DOMINATED SPACE. EXAMPLES INCLUDE RHIANNON GIDDENS AND HER BAND THE CAROLINA CHOCOLATE DROPS (OLD-TIME/COUNTRY BLUES/SKIFFLE), JAKE BLOUNT (MUSIC SCHOLAR, AFROFUTURISM/ OLD-TIME/BUEGRASS/FOLK), KAREN MCCORMICK (COUNTRY POP), RISSI PALMER (COUNTRY SOUL), MICKEY GUYTON (CONTEMPORARY COUNTRY, POP/R&B INFLUENCE), REYNA ROBERTS (COUNTRY POP), KANE BROWN (COUNTRY POP).

WHILE ALL ARE ENTITLED TO THEIR RESPECTIVE MUSIC PREFERENCES, RECOGNIZING AND CREDITING BIPOC VOICES IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY IS IMPERATIVE IN RECLAIMING A GENRE THAT HAS DISCOURAGED, ERASED, DISCRIMINATED, AND ENACTED VIOLENCE TOWARDS THESE ARTISTS SINCE ITS CONCEPTION. COUNTRY MUSIC WAS PIONEERED BY AND WILL CONTINUE TO LIVE ON THROUGH BIPOC VOICES.

R&B IS DEAD?:

CONFRONTING THE MYTH AND LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

Written by Anna Linn and Designed by Kat Smith

In August 2022, artist, record producer, and executive Diddy proclaimed that “R&B is muthafuckin’ dead as of right now,” setting off fires across social media. Amid the outrage, the hip-hop monolith actually spotlighted a crisis that has underlied all of the 2000s. Almost in perfect conjunction with the rise of rap, rhythm and blues, known for its uninhibited vocals, captivating rhythms, and raw lyrics, began to decline in popularity after peaking on the Billboard Hot 100 and Top 40 Radio in 2004, leading to the nascent debate: is R&B dead? To worsen matters, many old-school R&B artists fight the music’s morphing, experimental sound in the 21st century and find themselves disillusioned with the quick-output models of pop and rap that are largely incompatible with R&B’s focus on musicality. R&B, however, is a core piece of African American culture regardless of its musical evolution or traction in the mainstream; for R&B artists, the question of their genre’s vitality lies much deeper than commercial success and it should for audiences, too. It’s a question that challenges the essence of R&B and if that essence has a place in the music industry today.

The sound of R&B has always been difficult to pin down because even in its formative moments, R&B was an amalgamation of musical styles. The Great Migration of the early twentieth century brought African Americans from the Jim Crow South to urban hubs in the Northeast and Midwest including Chicago, Detroit, and New York City. These enterprising individuals sought economic and educational opportunity, carrying with them rich musical histories inextricably developed under the context of oppression that, when brought together, molded and melted to create a variety of musical styles. New markets opened up for genres including boogie, swing, jazz, and blues, but these markets were race-defined. In 1948, the term “rhythm and blues” emerged after RCA Victor Records first used it to replace the term “race music” as an umbrella reference for any secular music marketed toward African Americans. “Rhythm and blues” took responsibility for all of the aforementioned genres, indicating that the term’s practical function in the music industry and its musical reality were not the same. The R&B sound that came to be defined throughout the 1950s certainly incorporated these genres into its foundation, but began to strike out with its own distinctive combination of themes, instrumentation, and rhythms; expressive singers detailed love, heartbreak, and struggle over smooth, mesmerizing beats and blues progressions. It was honesty paired with rhythmic drive, and though the genre continued to evolve, the sound developed in the 50s is still audible in the R&B we know today. Powerhouse vocalists such as Ray Charles, Ruth Brown, and Willie Mae Thornton established a firm presence in popular music and set the tone for what R&B was, even as the sound became more subdued in the 1960s with Sam Cooke and Marvin Gaye.

To older generations, R&B became one of those pesky new trends, complete with raunchy, damaging lyrics and embraced by a rebellious youth. R&B was further politicized in the era of segregation for its ability to unite younger generations beyond racial barriers. Before he was “The King of Rock and Roll”, Elvis Presley released covers of R&B songs marketed towards white audiences, turning the mainstream ear towards R&B progressions and rhythms and priming pop culture for rock and roll. Pianist Fats Domino, a pioneer of this new style, felt familiar with it already, stating, “what they call rock ‘n’ roll now is rhythm and blues. I’ve been playing it for 15 years in New Orleans.” Thus from the 1940s to 60s, R&B both expanded and contracted, taking on a new identity but sacrificing some of the autonomy that R&B artists held over their own sound as rock and roll came to be indicative of middle-class, white America.

As early as the 1970s, a new style of music, rap, emerged when club MCs began to talk and rhyme over percussive breaks, in sync with the music. Rap pieced itself into the African American music tradition

as an accessible way for youth to start making music. At minimum, one needed a voice and a beat, and the grassroots construction of the genre translated to cost-effective production and thus commercial success. Hip-hop's creativity and ambition took hold of America in the late 80s' and 90s', but this era-defining sound stood on the shoulders of other giants in music history, notably R&B, soul, disco, and jazz. What was strictly deemed R&B was consolidated under several major record labels, boosting artists like Aaliyah, Destiny's Child, and Mary J. Blige to success. R&B artists such as Usher, with his impressive vocal range and honest lyrics, took on a hip-hop image to become more marketable. As R&B began to take cues from its more profitable cousin, rap music reciprocated, offering up melodies and emotional vulnerability as it evolved. What began to take place was an unprecedented and persistent blurring of the two genres in the public imagination. Again, R&B compromised its sound and was grouped with hip-hop on Billboard's music charts, constricting how people discovered R&B music and what they understood it to be. But what was it about these two genres specifically that drew them together?

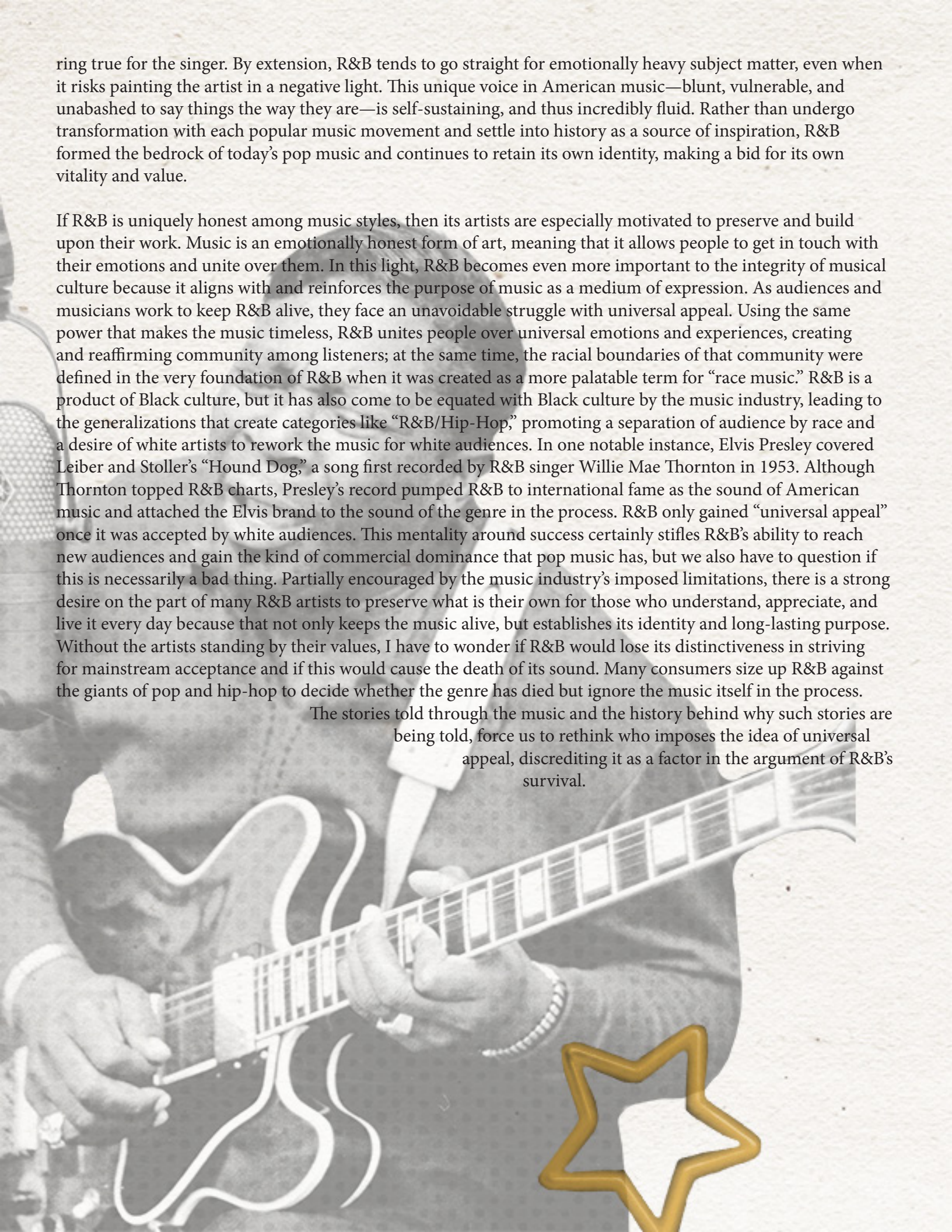
From a technical standpoint, hip-hop and R&B artists looked to the same musical foundation laid out before them and interpreted it into two distinct forms of art. They emphasized many of the same elements which allowed them to eventually weave their way back together. Inspired by generations of blues, jazz, soul, and gospel, both genres developed as rhythm-focused. Syncopation, or off-setting the beat to draw attention to the weak beats, is a staple of the aforementioned styles and is used to drive a song forward with the way each segment of the music bleeds into the next, creating stronger grooves. Subtle density also comes naturally because syncopation creates the impression of extra room in the beat which provides an opportunity to layer various rhythms. When it comes to instrumentation, hip-hop and R&B use the full spectrum of pitch and texture, sharing piano, electric guitar, bass, and drums. More recently, producers use software loops of these instruments to create the backing track for artists to sing or rap over. The closer these genres get, however, the easier it is to define what sits at the heart of R&B, especially in contemporary music. Rap begins to bleed into R&B when it prioritizes lyrical authenticity. R&B singers reveal palpable emotions just with the quality of their voice, but in order to do this, whatever they are singing about—love, heartbreak, cheating, pain—must



ring true for the singer. By extension, R&B tends to go straight for emotionally heavy subject matter, even when it risks painting the artist in a negative light. This unique voice in American music—blunt, vulnerable, and unabashed to say things the way they are—is self-sustaining, and thus incredibly fluid. Rather than undergo transformation with each popular music movement and settle into history as a source of inspiration, R&B formed the bedrock of today's pop music and continues to retain its own identity, making a bid for its own vitality and value.

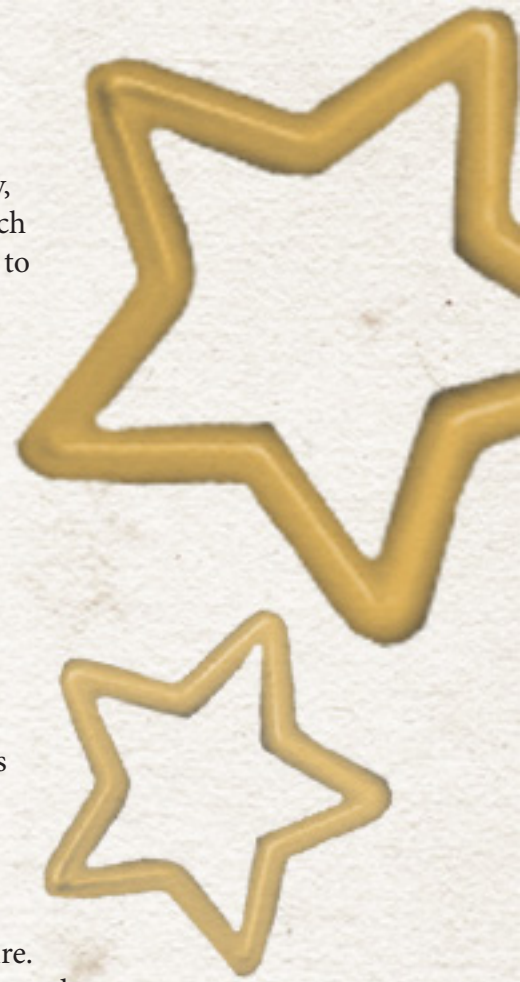
If R&B is uniquely honest among music styles, then its artists are especially motivated to preserve and build upon their work. Music is an emotionally honest form of art, meaning that it allows people to get in touch with their emotions and unite over them. In this light, R&B becomes even more important to the integrity of musical culture because it aligns with and reinforces the purpose of music as a medium of expression. As audiences and musicians work to keep R&B alive, they face an unavoidable struggle with universal appeal. Using the same power that makes the music timeless, R&B unites people over universal emotions and experiences, creating and reaffirming community among listeners; at the same time, the racial boundaries of that community were defined in the very foundation of R&B when it was created as a more palatable term for “race music.” R&B is a product of Black culture, but it has also come to be equated with Black culture by the music industry, leading to the generalizations that create categories like “R&B/Hip-Hop,” promoting a separation of audience by race and a desire of white artists to rework the music for white audiences. In one notable instance, Elvis Presley covered Leiber and Stoller’s “Hound Dog,” a song first recorded by R&B singer Willie Mae Thornton in 1953. Although Thornton topped R&B charts, Presley’s record pumped R&B to international fame as the sound of American music and attached the Elvis brand to the sound of the genre in the process. R&B only gained “universal appeal” once it was accepted by white audiences. This mentality around success certainly stifles R&B’s ability to reach new audiences and gain the kind of commercial dominance that pop music has, but we also have to question if this is necessarily a bad thing. Partially encouraged by the music industry’s imposed limitations, there is a strong desire on the part of many R&B artists to preserve what is their own for those who understand, appreciate, and live it every day because that not only keeps the music alive, but establishes its identity and long-lasting purpose. Without the artists standing by their values, I have to wonder if R&B would lose its distinctiveness in striving for mainstream acceptance and if this would cause the death of its sound. Many consumers size up R&B against the giants of pop and hip-hop to decide whether the genre has died but ignore the music itself in the process.

The stories told through the music and the history behind why such stories are being told, force us to rethink who imposes the idea of universal appeal, discrediting it as a factor in the argument of R&B’s survival.



R&B has experienced nearly a century of rises, falls, and reimaginings, but ultimately it still has to establish its own place in the present. As it searches for that independence in an increasingly diverse and interconnected music industry, it's essential to acknowledge that R&B is entirely a product of Black culture, which is evident in the music itself. R&B's interpretation of honesty is inextricably tied to African American experiences because it was in the face of opposition that the need to express the sadness and joy of life using music was even necessary. The majority of R&B artists and listeners are Black Americans, arguably creating a more intimate relationship between production and consumption because everything from the rhythmic character of the music to the subject matter speaks to a shared musical history and reality. At the same time, however, the age of consumption stifles this kind of operation by prioritizing quick output, universal appeal, and profitability. R&B has always required heavy involvement from a variety of experienced musicians—singers, producers, instrumentalists, and songwriters—just to produce one record. Labels are increasingly unwilling to put in the necessary amount of time and money for R&B when rap or pop music can generate more streams for cheaper. Beneath these issues, however, the underlying messages of R&B remain strong and steady, and the genre retains power because its ability to touch people is enduring. The surface of R&B must undergo change in this new environment, but as the operation adapts and the sound evolves, it becomes clear that this is not the first challenge R&B has faced. The appearance and sounds of R&B have always evolved in response to the emotional needs of its community and it has become a kind of genreless genre. Rock and roll was one of the first translations of R&B quickly followed up by rap, and these popular music movements contributed positively to music as they produced new sounds, drew broader audiences, and shifted cultural mindsets. At the same time, R&B was overshadowed, stolen from, and forced to rethink its sound in order to keep up with its trendy successors. However, if you examine the timeline, R&B never disappeared behind these other sounds; rather, parts of the sound broke off to create new genres while R&B continued to stand on its own. The genre's perseverance attests to listeners' desire for emotional honesty in music, even as those feelings are expressed differently over time.

Today R&B grows in a way that pays homage to its legacy of fluidity, dipping into every kind of contemporary sound that artists can experiment with. Frank Ocean, a pioneer of neo-soul, walks a boundary between indie and R&B with a variety of psychedelic, electronic, and funk sounds paired with lyrical sagacity that bolsters his work into art music. Bryson Tiller follows in the vein of Usher, mixing hip-hop influences into his melodies while holding the status of a pop star. Bay Area native Kehlani proudly claims her roots throughout her ballad declarations of queer love and self-reflection. R&B's compelling sound has been diffused throughout music from funk grooves in pop, to a new life for standards like "I Got a Woman" and "You're the One" in rap samples, but the heart of the music has never strayed. R&B is a genre that forces us to look back and re-examine our shared music history because our critique of its evolution in the present exposes the limitations we placed on it in the past. R&B pushes these boundaries because it understands that the stories it tells will speak for themselves and reach audiences, no matter how the expression of them changes. Artists continue to say exactly what is on their mind, prioritizing energy and full-bodied sound to convey the intricacies of life that aren't necessarily revolutionary, just honest, and thus worth sharing. As long as people want and need to tell those stories, R&B will live on.





Talent Unseen:

The Effects of Misogyny in Rap

In recent times, the diversification of artists in every music genre has definitely spiked. Accessible mass media has played a great role in making it possible for all artists to showcase their talent without a signed label, large budget, or any major production. Maintaining this theme, the rap and hip-hop industry has finally started accommodating a larger space for Black female rappers and their talents. This is crucial to note as, for the most part, their artistry has often been historically disregarded.

We open social media apps like Tik-Tok and see exactly how much our modern culture relies on Black women and their art. Rappers like Megan Thee Stallion, Flo Mili, Mulatto, Cardi B, and Rico Nasty have all gained traction due to the popularity of their songs being used across all platforms. More than that, they have gained loyal fans and listeners who have helped many of these artists gain constant national exposure. Yet, even though these women are finally beginning to get the credit they deserve, avid consumers of rap and hip-hop must question why it took so long for this shift to happen. More importantly, we must then question the industry that actively perpetuates a cycle of misogyny. This ongoing pattern allows for women in the rap industry to have their talents constantly questioned despite it being obvious their successes are indeed warranted.

Misogyny in rap and hip-hop is not a new phenomenon. Black women like Missy Elliot, Lil Kim, and Nicki Minaj, who garnered success early on in this genre, have spoken on this issue countless times. As women, their talents are often downplayed and their opportunities limited due to not being taken seriously by big names in the industry. Many times allyship from big labels could propel many women's careers forward, yet these labels choose not to do so. Looking through prestigious award institutions and popular music sites, it is very telling of who they deem worthy of praise within this male-dominated community.

Simply looking at the GRAMMYS category of "Best Rap Album," we see the jarring inequity in nominations and wins given to women. Since 1996, less than 10 nominations have been held by women even though there has been a much longer list of albums made by Black female rappers. In 2019,



Cardi B made history by becoming the first woman to win “Best Rap Album” of the year with her project *Invasion of Privacy*. Of course, it is important to celebrate her win as a powerful, unapologetic artist, yet it is troublesome to note that she is the first to win despite the many iconic artists that have come before her. Though awards are not a direct correlation to talent, it is important to note Black women are seldom credited for their impact on culture and music in general.

Following this lack of representation in big media, publications like *Rolling Stone* and *XXL* fail to showcase enough Black female rappers through their work. *Rolling Stone* is notorious for making large claims when it comes to their opinions on albums, artists, and anything else they consider the “next best thing” in music. They are well respected by large audiences and their views are often agreed on. Therefore, it is rather disheartening to look through their articles regarding “The Greatest Rap Albums of All Time.” With publications like these, it can be noted that less than 5 of the albums out of the top 20 were made by women. When Black women are not given these titles of high esteem, their works and their impact are often downplayed within the industry. Though many of these women become the backbone and future samples for male rappers, many are not credited for their contributions. The influence of Black women in rap is momentous in the music we listen to today, yet listeners are often alienated from this part of music history.

Men love to use Black women. Black women are the muses to their music, props in their music videos, and expected supporters on the sidelines. When it comes to giving Black women in their industry proper kudos, many of these men draw the line. You see, it is this misogynistic perspective tied so heavily to the rap industry. It is this perspective that deems women as mere objects to exploit. Their value is attributed to their proximity to these influential men in rap, but never for the music and talent that speaks for itself. It is difficult for men in the industry, along with many listeners, to accept that Black women are often more qualified than many of the current men deemed stars in the rap sphere. It is even more difficult to grasp that a woman’s success is not tied to the male gaze or clouded perceptions of what a Black woman’s mind and body is made for.





Even though we have seen so many Black women rise to success, we have also seen Black women in the industry internalize this misogyny and contribute to this unaccommodating environment in the rap sphere. Recently, legendary Nicki Minaj has disappointed many of her listeners and avid fans by constantly fighting and harassing up and coming female rappers. Funny enough, Nicki Minaj is an artist that has been in the rap game long enough to be at the receiving end of this misogyny. Instead of uplifting the next generation of rappers, she continues to adopt the nasty habits that many of the men in the industry gave her. We see her hold onto this misogynistic mentality of only being successful if she appeases the men surrounding her. It is clear she sees her success directly tied to men instead of seeing the potential allyship that she should have with these women. By bullying and creating this drama with many of the new rappers, she is then creating animosity against them with her fan base, along with closing possible windows of opportunity for them.

Not all women in rap are immune to internalized misogyny. Like we see through Nicki Minaj, this cycle is insistent and difficult to break. This is why it is important to pay attention to what we are passively consuming on a daily basis. Though Rap and Hip-Hop are rich in culture and essential to many people's everyday playlist, it is also pivotal to question the oppressive cycles it glamorizes. There is power in streaming these Black women in rap and supporting their talents by any means possible. Broadening what your music library looks like and actively seeking out these incredible women actively goes against this male dominated industry. It is also important to question these systems that feed into this misogyny and hold them accountable for choosing not to break the cycle.

Misogyny coming from male rappers is rarely criticized as it seems to happen so often. Song after song, lyric after lyric, we hear these men belittle women and attribute their worthiness to their bodies or what they can do to enhance a man's life. This is not speculation, rather a fact that men proudly boast about in their lyrics. Some of the most popular male rappers to date have countless music graphically describing women as sex objects, alluding to violence against women, and overall





glorifying disrespectful behavior. These respected artists are noted for using words like “bitches,” “females,” “hoes,” etc. to describe women in their music. As listeners, this kind of message gets repeated so often that we may dismiss the way it crosses over to real social relations.

It becomes apparent that this issue is not merely misogynistic, rather it is an issue that disproportionately affects Black women. Many Black men are guilty of using their music to blatantly belittle Black women. Recently, we heard this through Drake and 21 Savage’s new collaborative album *Her Loss*. In the song “Circo Loco,” Drake takes a jab at Megan Thee Stallion by rapping, “This bitch lie ‘bout getting shots but she still a stallion.” Alluding to her getting shot by Tory Lanez is not only unwarranted, but violent. The lack of respect that many Black men in the rap industry have for Black women is clearly seen through instances like these where they are profiting off of the pain and hate against these women. More often, we see tacky remarks against Black women and their bodies. In his song “scapegoats,” rapper Baby Keem describes wanting to sleep with light skinned women. Not only does this language minimize women to their bodies, but it also guises Black women as unwanted. This type of ideology visibly translates to the music sphere because it is this type of mentality that discredits Black women in the industry; it deems them as sexual objects with no skill. The thoughts that these men of power have on women greatly influences the way they interact with them. Many producers and heads of music labels are greatly swayed by this mentality, which as a consequence closes the door for many women working towards stardom.

Though there are constant hurdles that Black women face in the rap and hip-hop industry, it is amazing to see so many let their talent speak for itself. Rappers like Flo Milli, City Girls, and Megan Thee Stallion have been infiltrating space by reclaiming their womanhood. Instead of letting the men in the industry dictate their identity, they let their artistry and lyricism backtalk all the negative stereotypes attributed to women. Garnering millions of listeners monthly, all of these artists have contradicted negative perceptions of Black female rappers by showing that their talents surpass it all. They are unapologetically themselves and even use the same sexuality that has been exploited as a tool they choose to reclaim.

Written by Jocelyn Ortiz and Designed by Elise Rodriguez



HEY, HEY, WE'RE THE PUNK-EES:

The unlikely influences of punk

Written by Gianna Caudillo &
Designed by Carolina Munce

The public's lasting perception of 60s pop-rock band the Monkees sounds a little like this: a Neil Diamond impersonator screaming out to a group of picnicking families, "How many of you remember a Saturday morning program known as The Monkees?!" followed up by a live rendition of the title track from *Shrek* (2001), "I'm a Believer." The Monkees are best remembered as a short-lived bubblegum pop group put together by television producers to sell records, appeal to an audience of tweenage girls, and cash in on the floppy-haired success of The Beatles. It would be ludicrous to suggest they were anything more than a product of their time—or would it?

In 1978, nearly a decade after the band had broken up, former Monkee Michael Nesmith was quoted in *Blitz* magazine as having said, "and what's all of this I keep hearing about the Monkees becoming punk heroes?." This was true—after eight years of nearly no mainstream activity from any of the former Monkees, the Suicide Commandos, the Sex Pistols and numerous other punk bands had cited the Monkees as major influences on their work, and by doing so were redefining the Monkees' image to be exactly what the band themselves had attempted to do a decade prior.

In 1965, Micky Dolenz, Michael Nesmith, Peter Tork, and Davy Jones were brought together to become the newest Beatlesque idols in the 60s tween-scene, selected in a casting call for a dream job: a guaranteed record deal, a TV show, and instant celebrity status. However, mere days into their stint as Monkees, the dreamland illusion faded; the band was forbidden to play on their records or write their own songs, and when the public found out that the Monkees "did not play their own instruments" (despite the fact that they could, just weren't allowed to), the backlash was earth-shattering. The press began to refer to them as the "Prefab Four," other musicians viewed them as a manufactured cash-grab, and the Monkees themselves grew resentful.

In 1967, after a battle with their music supervisor, the Monkees gained full creative control and released their first "real" album, *Headquarters*, in which they were finally able to play together as a real band. Dolenz, a non-drummer cast as "the drummer," had learned to play within the year, and he, Nesmith, and Tork all wrote their own original material for the album. *Headquarters* is historic because it is the first example of a prefabricated vocal act becoming a real band. It doesn't matter that Dolenz's drum lines are shaky at times or that the instrumental arrangements are simplistic, through a DIY approach that would later become popular in the 1970s punk movement, The Monkees reclaimed their image from the establishment that had controlled them and cobbled together an album through sheer force of will.

In this way, the Monkees can be likened to the Ramones, whose stripped-down, simplistic sound became the basis for the entire genre of punk rock. The Ramones were not musical virtuosos, but their music, though crude, has a power that still excites audiences to this day. The Monkees' *Headquarters* is certainly no example of outstanding musical skill, but it contains a track that is perhaps as punk as any song the Ramones ever wrote, the Dolenz-penned "Randy Scouse Git," translated in England as "horny Liverpoolian putz," and deemed so offensive that it was renamed "Alternate Title" on all UK issues. "Randy Scouse Git" is a remarkably hardcore single for a bubblegum-pop band, the heavy timpani line striking a dramatic impression as Dolenz screams out, "Why don't you cut your hair? / Why don't you live up there? Why don't you do what I do / See what I feel when I care?," in a straight-to-the-point chorus leveled at the criticism the Monkees received for their long hair and manufactured image. Dolenz didn't stop there; as Monkeemia died down, he wrote a song so controversial that the record label forced him to change ninety percent of the original lyrics before release. "Mommy and Daddy," released on *The Monkees Present* (1969), is brutal, including lyrics such as, "Ask your Mommy and Daddy who really killed JFK" and "Whisper Mommy and Daddy, 'Would it matter if the bullet went through my head? / If it was my blood spilling on the kitchen floor / If it was my blood, Mommy, would you care a little more?'" Even though both of these songs seem lighthearted in musical arrangement, their proto-punk, anti-establishment side shines through in their lyricism; it is clear to see why a band like the Sex Pistols, famous for their "no-masters" lyrical critiques, would take copious notes.

And yet, these songs barely scratch the surface of the Monkees' countercultural suicide note: their 1968 film *Head*, in which every aspect of the Monkees' manufactured career is highlighted, mocked, and destroyed. The film quite literally begins with a suicide; Dolenz jumps off a bridge, and the scene transitions into a mockery of the Monkees television theme, a taunting rhyme titled "Ditty-Diego War-Chant" that opens with the verse, "Hey hey we are the Monkees / You know we love to please / A manufactured image / With no philosophies." And as if the Monkees hadn't already proven that they were tired of living a narrative pushed by the capitalistic greed that had created them, they follow the chant with the completely uncensored execution of a Viet Cong soldier. *Head* goes on to feature Dolenz blowing up a Coke machine with a tank (a comment on the Monkees being forced to "sell out" for sponsors), a live performance of Nesmith's protest song "Circle Sky" (The lyric "And it looks like we've made it to the end" foreshadowing the end of the Monkees), Dolenz and Nesmith placing bets on whether a girl will commit suicide or not, a constant motif of the band ending up in the "black box" of their own manufactured prison, and to close the movie, all of the Monkees committing suicide by jumping off the same bridge, only to end up back in the locked black box, in which they are waterboarded.

Shocking imagery and all, *Head* is punk before punk. A 90-minute feature film in which an auditioned boy band renounces their manufactured image and tears apart the capitalistic society that created them, all whilst demonstrating that by nature of their contracts, they will always be forced to return to their work as a product that can be bought, sold, and construed as the consumers please, is undoubtedly the gutsiest move the Monkees could have pulled, and its anti-establishment sentiments are echoed in much of the Sex Pistols' catalogue including one of their most popular songs, "Anarchy in the U.K." ("Your future dream is a shopping scheme") and their cover of the Monkees' "(I'm Not Your) Steppin' Stone." Yet, regardless of the Monkees' impact on the Sex Pistols, they still have gotten next-to-no credit as a legitimate musical artist; their constant media censorship, used in order to maintain their clean-cut image, made it so they were screaming their complaints into a void rather than on public television like the Sex Pistols did in their infamous 1976 *Today* interview. This extends to their albums as well—the *Head* soundtrack is comprised of some of the most fantastic psychedelic protest songs to have ever been put to record but has never been given credit as a momentous album, while the Sex Pistols' "Never Mind the Bollocks" ranks among the top 100 albums of all time, according to *Time* magazine. The Monkees' plight in the music industry parallels the experiences of Linda McCartney.

Not only was McCartney the only female musician in one of the most popular bands of the 1970s, Wings, she was also a fierce animal rights activist. And yet, McCartney's contributions to music and activism are overshadowed by the public perception that she was not, and would never be, the "perfect Beatle wife." When Linda McCartney married her husband Paul in 1969, the press had a field day poking cruel fun at the fact that she was curvy, that her sense of style was 'tacky,' that she didn't shave, that she didn't wear makeup, and that she had joined Wings without prior musical experience, claiming she "couldn't really play" and attributing her place in the band to her famous husband.

And yet, just as the Monkees proved their critics wrong, McCartney learned to play keyboard in mere months in order to get Wings on the road, defying the misogynistic critics who believed she wouldn't be up to par. The fact that McCartney dared to be a famous rockstar's wife who was decisively uncommitted to fitting gender norms overshadowed her musical accomplishments and left many people with the impression that she remained an untrained keyboard player for her entire life. However, McCartney was actually a trailblazer for women in music, if not only for her DIY approach to learning an instrument and writing songs, but also for her unique sense of style, combining bespoke men's fashion with women's garments and accessories often crafted out of keys, ribbon, and safety pins—an approach similar to that of punk legend Poly Styrene. Both Styrene and McCartney experienced comparable levels of misogyny for their physical appearances considered to be "outside the beauty norm," because of the fact that they combined men's clothes with women's in a way considered "unfashionable."





McCartney's greatest 'proto-punk' work can be found on her posthumous album *Wide Prairie*, a collection of songs she penned from the 1970s-1990s. The standout punk track is defiant "The Light Comes From Within," a song that counteracts McCartney's unflappable public image, giving her the so-called "last word" over all the critics she encountered in her lifetime. The lyrics "You say I'm simple / You say I'm a hick / You're fucking no one / You stupid dick," are shocking to hear coming from soft-spoken McCartney, but convey a sense of power she was previously not allotted as a woman in rock, a style of obstinate songwriting that would be coming to a forefront in the Riot Grrrl movement around the time the album was released. The track "I Got Up," proclaims, "It's good to know that I can set myself free / Anytime I want I can be the real me," while the Styrene-penned X-Ray Spex track, "Art-I-Ficial," includes the lyrics "When I put on my make-up, the pretty little masks not me / That's the way a girl should be / In a consumer society," both songs critiquing the nature of a society that expects women to look a certain way in order to succeed and the desire of both authors to "be free."

By nature of being a woman, McCartney experienced a different kind of discrimination than the Monkees, with most of her criticism rooted in misogyny. However, the circumstances McCartney and the Monkees crafted their finest countercultural works out of are very much the same; both artists were frustrated with their lack of autonomy as artists, and created music in retaliation to the criticism they faced for their personal styles, their public personas, and social issues they found particularly pressing. While neither artist created music in the heavy-rock genre we have now come to think of as 'punk,' their sentiments and artistic works are purposefully and decisively against the mainstream music industry that had come to trap them. Hence, both the Monkees and Linda McCartney's bodies of work should be looked at with fresh eyes, for although their contributions to the punk scene may be overshadowed by the legendary acts mentioned in this piece, their use of music and art in countercultural protest is as deserving as any to be considered truly punk.

RIOT GRRRL

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THE POLITICS OF RACE AND ANGER IN PUNK FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

Riot grrrl is an underground feminist punk movement that originated in the 1990s in the Pacific Northwest of the United States, although some argue the genre truly started in the 1970s with bands like X-Ray Spex and The Slits. Often associated with third wave feminism, riot grrrl centers the political, social, and economic disenfranchisement faced by women. More importantly, riot grrrl was about female anger. It emerged in after the 1991 Anita Hill testimony, where Anita Hill, a Black woman, testified against African-American judge Clarence Thomas for sexual harassment before a Senate Judiciary Committee. The all-white, all-male committee relentlessly discredited Hill's experience and dismissed her before ratifying Thomas to SCOTUS Justice.

Punk being the soundtrack to the "girl revolution" was intentional. First, punk is aggro as fuck, and it makes people listen. Second, it is nauseatingly male dominated. Anger is associated with masculinity in our cisheteronormative society. Anger is a rite of passage into manhood. Boys are castrated from the weakness of vulnerability and made into authoritative men who can lead revolutions, as if their god given right. While men are gelded from "weaker" emotions, women are baptized in their waters. We are to be docile, discreet, and most of all, quiet. Anger is a sin and its expression is a death sentence. So what happens when women get angry? You get "we are Bikini Kill, and we want revolution grrrl style now!" in Bikini Kill's "Double Dare Ya." You get riot grrrl. The term riot grrrl came from Allison Wolfe and Molly Neuman of Bratmobile, who coined the phrase "girl riot." Jen Smith then created the term "grrrl" and later "Riot Grrrl" through "angry grrrl zines," devised by Tobi Vail of Bikini Kill. Riot grrrl places anger at the center of girlhood by replacing the "i" with "rrr." A girl is a growl. A girl is a war cry. A girl is a riot. The Riot Grrrl Manifesto by Bikini Kill's Kathleen Hanna encouraged female punk musicians and fans to take up more space in the male dominated punk and alternative scene. More importantly, it encouraged girls to make music, art, and media specifically catered to their needs. Theirs was a fight against "the bullshit Christian capitalist way of doing things," and a fight for the creation of a non-hierarchical community that helped members "figure out how

bullshit like racism, able-bodieism, ageism, speciesism, classism, thinism, sexism, anti-semitism, and heterosexism figures in our own lives.' Zines, homemade DIY publications, were instrumental in leading discussions about "taboo" women's issues such as rape, incest, and addiction as well as mental health issues, feminist theory, and queer theory.

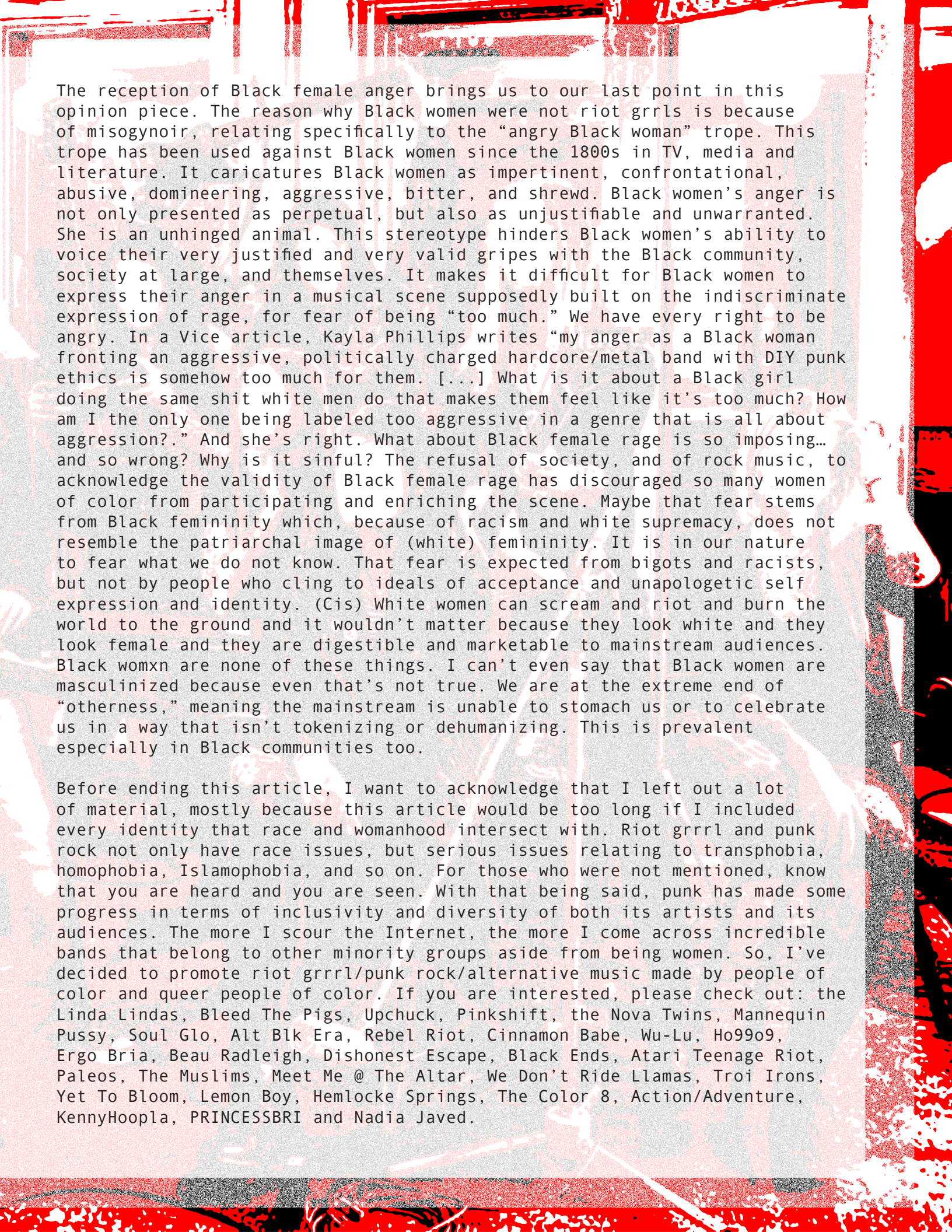
The movement was met with backlash and moral panic, notably by men and some women from both the scene and the mainstream media. Tabloids branded them as violent, as too radical, and painted the women as misandrists who needed to shut up and get laid. It also criticized riot grrrls' appearances at concerts, specifically with how freely fans and musicians alike scrawled the words rape and slut on their bodies. Bikini Kill would also often pass the microphone to audience members at concerts so they could share their sexual abuse stories. Racism, another "taboo" topic, often appeared in zines. Yet, none of the revered figures of movement were Black or women of color. Why is it that the movement which was kickstarted by the abuse of a Black woman had so few Black representatives at its helm?

Firstly, the absence of Black women from Riot Grrrl and from rock stems from deliberate revisionism by the music industry and media. Namely, white executives in the early 1900s categorized music made by artists of color as "race music" as a way to profit off communities of color while restricting what kind of music could be played on white radio stations. By 1950, "race music" turned into "rhythm and blues," a genre that was almost designed to keep Black artists in a specific lane. It was a musical segregation of sorts which still persists to this day. White visionaries were allowed to branch out of mainstream genres to create newer subgenres. They were allowed to challenge the status quo while Black artists were relentlessly funneled into R&B, then later hip-hop. This explains why rock n' roll's patron saint is Elvis Presley and not Sister Rosetta Tharpe, a Black queer gospel singer who started the genre and the use of distortion on electric guitar in the 1930s. It also explains why Tharpe was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2018, 45 years after her death, while Elvis was mythicized while he was still alive. Finally, it explains why the godmother of girl punk is Patti Smith and not Poly Styrene of X-Ray Spex. The revisionism of rock's, and subsequently punk's, history as a white genre makes people of color feel alien in the punk scene. They can't identify with its whiteness. They can only relate to other core components of punk like anger, the rejection of mainstream society and its power structures, oppression, and queerness.

Secondly, the bulk of punk's discography is devoid of discussions about race from racialized people. As in, race, when it was occasionally discussed, was talked about by white musicians. Black voices were silenced because discussions about race weren't led by Black people. Ramdasha Bikceem founded the GUNK zine, one of the only Black female-owned zines, in 1990. In her fourth issue, she said that the anti-racism workshops, which were directed by white riot grrrls, weren't effective due to these women's lack of experience with racist behavior. In her words, "maybe it (the grrrl revolution) shouldn't just be limited to white, middle-class, punk rock grrrls 'cuz there's no denyin' that's what it is." Furthermore, the closeness of women in riot grrrl groups created emotional enmeshment where one woman's experience was "felt" by all women. This isn't necessarily bad, but it can

subconsciously promote monolithic womanhood, such that as a monolith, all women express anger at the same things and in the same way. This is obviously not true. White riot grrrls inadvertently created a movement that was only relatable for them and there was no thought given to the inclusion of women of color. Subconsciously, it was like Black women were expected to be grateful that their white counterparts were fighting for them because they all shared the same sexual organs. Kathleen Hanna herself acknowledged that it was as if "white, middle class, straight people [feel] entitled to everything, even other people's oppression." For Black women, the stakes were higher than having the right to wear the clothing they wanted or being able to sing on stage like the boys. To Black women, body autonomy extends far beyond the constraining vestimentary biases of society. Black women cared about the fact that they are more likely to die during childbirth simply for being Black women. They cared about themselves and their community being the victims of police brutality. They cared about being one of the most economically disadvantaged people in the United States. Black queer womxn cared about how they are more likely to be disowned from their families, sexually abused, and murdered for the mere fact of being Black, female identifying, and queer. So by conjoining their struggles to those of Black womxn, white feminists inadvertently replicated the very systems of oppression they vowed to dismantle while silencing the voices they aimed to uplift.

Thus, riot grrrl's anti racist and intersectional image was less based on actual intersectionality, i.e. really knowing the deep implication of being a racialized person, but on appearing to acknowledge their privilege as white women by simply "including" women of color in their secret societies. Black women were turned into cultural capital and instrumentalized by white feminists to appeared radical for embracing something as provocative to the establishment as blackness and queerness. However, white radicalism has been normalized historically. When we are taught about revolution and anti-establishment, we are taught about the French Revolution, the American Revolution, the Russian Revolution etc. When POC try to overthrow oppressive systems, they are villainized. Think of every revolution against US-backed governments (or French, British, Russian, etc.) in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Think about BLM and how it was reduced to looting and futile violence by mainstream media and not an organized and peaceful attempt at dismantling a policing system bent on oppressing racial minorities and upholding white supremacy. White women, like white men, can get violent and radical and history will reward them (although whether history is right or wrong for rewarding them is another, more complicated and frankly unrelated issue). White women, in spite of being a marginalized group, are still white. In the words of Ramdasha Bikceem, "no matter how much they deviated from the norms of society their whiteness always shows through." This partly explains how by the time 1997 rolled around, "girl power" was in fashion. Girl power, which was co-opted by the Spice Girls, became a manufactured commodity. It was on t-shirts and lunchboxes, TV and radio. Then came Avril Lavigne, P!nk, and Gwen Stefani in the late 90s and early 2000s. Would girl power have become mainstream had it been the product of Black female radicalism? Would it be fashionable to endorse Black anger, let alone Black female anger?



The reception of Black female anger brings us to our last point in this opinion piece. The reason why Black women were not riot grrls is because of misogynoir, relating specifically to the “angry Black woman” trope. This trope has been used against Black women since the 1800s in TV, media and literature. It caricatures Black women as impertinent, confrontational, abusive, domineering, aggressive, bitter, and shrewd. Black women’s anger is not only presented as perpetual, but also as unjustifiable and unwarranted. She is an unhinged animal. This stereotype hinders Black women’s ability to voice their very justified and very valid gripes with the Black community, society at large, and themselves. It makes it difficult for Black women to express their anger in a musical scene supposedly built on the indiscriminate expression of rage, for fear of being “too much.” We have every right to be angry. In a Vice article, Kayla Phillips writes “my anger as a Black woman fronting an aggressive, politically charged hardcore/metal band with DIY punk ethics is somehow too much for them. [...] What is it about a Black girl doing the same shit white men do that makes them feel like it’s too much? How am I the only one being labeled too aggressive in a genre that is all about aggression?.” And she’s right. What about Black female rage is so imposing... and so wrong? Why is it sinful? The refusal of society, and of rock music, to acknowledge the validity of Black female rage has discouraged so many women of color from participating and enriching the scene. Maybe that fear stems from Black femininity which, because of racism and white supremacy, does not resemble the patriarchal image of (white) femininity. It is in our nature to fear what we do not know. That fear is expected from bigots and racists, but not by people who cling to ideals of acceptance and unapologetic self expression and identity. (Cis) White women can scream and riot and burn the world to the ground and it wouldn’t matter because they look white and they look female and they are digestible and marketable to mainstream audiences. Black womxn are none of these things. I can’t even say that Black women are masculinized because even that’s not true. We are at the extreme end of “otherness,” meaning the mainstream is unable to stomach us or to celebrate us in a way that isn’t tokenizing or dehumanizing. This is prevalent especially in Black communities too.

Before ending this article, I want to acknowledge that I left out a lot of material, mostly because this article would be too long if I included every identity that race and womanhood intersect with. Riot grrrl and punk rock not only have race issues, but serious issues relating to transphobia, homophobia, Islamophobia, and so on. For those who were not mentioned, know that you are heard and you are seen. With that being said, punk has made some progress in terms of inclusivity and diversity of both its artists and its audiences. The more I scour the Internet, the more I come across incredible bands that belong to other minority groups aside from being women. So, I’ve decided to promote riot grrrl/punk rock/alternative music made by people of color and queer people of color. If you are interested, please check out: the Linda Lindas, Bleed The Pigs, Upchuck, Pinkshift, the Nova Twins, Mannequin Pussy, Soul Glo, Alt Blk Era, Rebel Riot, Cinnamon Babe, Wu-Lu, Ho99o9, Ergo Bria, Beau Radleigh, Dishonest Escape, Black Ends, Atari Teenage Riot, Paleos, The Muslims, Meet Me @ The Altar, We Don’t Ride Llamas, Troi Irons, Yet To Bloom, Lemon Boy, Hemlocke Springs, The Color 8, Action/Adventure, KennyHoopla, PRINCESSBRI and Nadia Javed.

HOMOPHOBIA IS GAY

Homoeroticism in Heavy Metal

Written by Lily Ramus & Designed by Heather Highland

DISCLAIMER

Some potentially offensive and homophobic language will be cited as evidence of homophobia in this piece. This author is queer and, while acknowledging its harm, uses such language to call out this subculture on its hypocrisy and appropriation of queer culture.

“I see all those old dudes out there just banging their heads to our records, and I have to think— ‘that stuff you’re banging your head to? That is some gay, gay metal, man.’” -Sean Reinert, drummer in Death and Cynic

Picture heavy metal music. What do you imagine? You might think of leather and chains, heavy guitars and mosh pits—dark rooms filled with sweaty, shirtless men in tight pants performing for more sweaty, shirtless men who physically grapple with each other. It’s so obvious I don’t feel the need to spell it out further—heavy metal is totally gay.

And yet, perhaps your associations with the genre are darker and jaundiced; perhaps it is violence, anger, and bigotry that comes to mind because, despite its seemingly obvious appropriation of queer aesthetics, heavy metal is one of the most homophobic music subcultures.

If it weren’t such a serious issue, the irony of the whole thing would be hilarious. But ultimately it’s not even surprising; more often than not, homophobia is gay. It’s the subculture’s inherent homoeroticism that makes it such a vile, homophobic place. Despite the genre’s proclivity for homophobia, this article will focus on homoeroticism in heavy metal via the genre’s male-dominated demographic, forgotten influence of queer fashion, and common lyrical motifs exploring male-male power dynamics, phallic symbolism, and gay sex acts.

An obvious place to start my analysis is metal’s overwhelmingly male demographic. While statistics on the demographics of metal fans are challenging to find, a study published in 2018 revealed that only a mere 3% of metal artists identified as female and, speaking from personal experience, all of the metal concerts and festivals I’ve attended have had a majority male audience (I would estimate >70%). Another study published in 2020 revealed ‘progressive deathcore,’ a metal subgenre, had the lowest percentage of female fans of any genre documented on Spotify.

From its conception, metal has relied on the appreciation and support of a predominantly white, teenage, male audience. This demographic occupies a unique space; they are reared with the patriarchal conception that the world exists for their success, but at the same time lack the social, economic, and physical power in their adolescent forms to cashout on such promises. Heavy metal, with its extreme performance of masculinity, offers a refuge and a venue for such gender roles to be reenacted and reproduced. Through both a literal and figurative performance of gender, participation in heavy metal subculture serves as an affirmation of traditionally masculine gender roles.

Heavy metal shows are largely men performing for men, but, as alluded to above, this is exactly the point. A predominantly male demographic is required for the affirmation of masculinity that many young men seek from heavy metal subcultures. Sociologically, different genres of music serve different purposes and, due to a correlation between metal's speed, intensity, and complexity and a male preference for 'heavy' music, it has been hypothesized that heavy/extreme metal exists as a means for men to impress other men in a status-seeking competition.

A recent psychology study titled, "Extreme Metal Guitar Skill: A Case of Male-Male Status Seeking, Mate Attraction, or Byproduct?" revealed that male metal lead guitar players honed their skills not to increase their attractiveness to women, but to impress other men and thus gain greater social status. In contrast, the study showed that pop music, ballads, or music that (generally) involves playing mainly chords on the guitar, is produced by men in order to "attract mates."

While this study required that participants were heterosexual, its results have inherently homoerotic undertones. In this study, the guitar was selected as the agent of analysis because, as opposed to many popular music genres where vocals are seen as the sonic trademark, in rock and metal this role is filled by the guitar. In the past century the guitar has become a symbol of masculinity and in popular culture is frequently characterized as an extension of the phallus. This is abundantly clear in rock and metal where guitarists have popularized playing the instrument low-slung across the crotch as opposed to its traditional placement between the chest and waist. Metal has also popularized an increasingly pornographic catalog of extreme guitar body shapes including the 'Flying V'—a guitar shaped like an upside-down 'V' which is played straddling the guitarist's leg.

Another place where metal's male-dominated demographic comes into play is the prevalence of mosh pits at metal shows. The aggressive, highly physical form of crowd participation further asserts metal's hyper-masculinity and role in affirming traditionally masculine characteristics for both musicians and fans. Furthermore, the demographic of metal subcultures and physicality of moshing warrants a comparison to sports in that both are socially acceptable ways in which men can be physical with each other without fear of



being perceived as 'gay.' However, there's no denying that the premise of mosh pits, much like sports, is innately homoerotic. It is an avenue for men, who are often half naked and very sweaty, to bond with each other both physically, and emotionally, over a shared interest. Oftentimes, moshing evolves into less violent forms of physical intimacy such as group headbanging and even hugging.

While Black Sabbath, formed in 1968, is considered the first metal band, Judas Priest formed the following year in 1969 (although they did not achieve mainstream commercial success until the 1980s). Judas Priest frontman Rob Halford is recognized as one of the most influential frontmen in heavy metal history for both his "powerful and wide ranging vocal style and trademark leather-and-studs image," and in 1998 Halford publicly came out as gay.

Yeah, that's right. The leather, chains, studs, spikes, and all that shit that you associate with metal came from a gay man pulling from 1970s queer leather daddy culture (because of course it did, when have straight white men ever come up with trendy fashion). The gay leather scene originated in the 1940s, with the first leather bars opening in the mid-1950s and early 1960s. Halford first appeared onstage in his trademark leather outfit during the 1978 promotion of the Judas Priest album *Hell Bent for Leather*, and soon after the rest of the (heterosexual) band members adopted the look, making it a key component of the Judas Priest aesthetic.

During the same interview in which Halford publicly came out, he spoke on Judas Priest's adoption of the leather aesthetic stating, "I'm a gay man and I'm into leather and that sexual side of the leather world—and I'm gonna bring that onto the stage. So I came onstage wearing the leather stuff and the motorcycle, and for the first time I felt like, 'God this feels so good.'" Soon after Halford's onstage leather debut, the material was adopted by other popular metal bands including Iron Maiden, Motörhead, and Saxon, quickly becoming a prolific aesthetic throughout heavy metal subcultures.

In the early 1980s, glam metal, taking from its cousin glam rock (think David Bowie), popularized tight clothing, fishnets, makeup, jewelry, and long feminine hairstyles on men. The result was an androgynous look—an adoption by male performers of aesthetics long associated with women's function as objects of the male gaze. Ironically, lyrically glam metal exploits straight sexual endeavors more than any other metal subgenre and, in an interesting role reversal, the appropriation of feminine aesthetics by male performers was to appeal to the female gaze.

While glam rock was more self aware in its adoption of androgyny (once again, thank you Bowie), glam metal was unable to see its own irony. Despite pulling from an aesthetic rooted in David Bowie's queerness, popular glam bands such as Skid Row and Mötley Crüe were explicitly homophobic. Nikki Sixx, frontman of Mötley Crüe has used the f-slur many times in interviews and in 1990, Sebastian Bach, lead singer of Skid Row, came under fire after wearing a shirt on stage that read 'AIDS Kill Fags Dead,' a cold and heartless parody of the tagline for Raid roach killer. When contrasted with the explicit descriptions of heterosexual relationships in lyrics, such homophobic acts provide an opportunity for a public affirmation of heterosexuality.



It's important to note here that despite its immense commercial success in the 80s, glam metal has since become one of the most controversial subgenres for metal elitists. While it is typically categorized in record stores and music subscription services under heavy metal, glam metal is frequently criticized as being less 'heavy' than other prominent subgenres. This has little to do with any tangible musical differences and is largely because of its 'feminine' aesthetics. 'Gay' is frequently used in a negative connotation to describe glam metal as well 'fag/faggot' when referring to specific glam metal performers. In 1988, thrash metal band MX Machine released their album *Manic Panic*, the cover of which bears a sticker with the slogan "No Glam Fags! All Metal! No Makeup!."



Despite these misguided homophobic associations, androgyny in heavy metal offers male performers an opportunity to play with flamboyancy and elevate the production value of their performances. As an alternative subculture, this experimentation with androgyny also serves as shock value and allows its participants to distinguish themselves from the conservative mainstream and their parents' generation. This subversive performance of gender is an idea which originated in queer communities but feels surprisingly at home in metal subcultures with their anarchist tendencies; in both communities, dramatic experimentation with gender serves as a critique of society's authoritative restrictions and a subversion of the mainstream.

Ironically, with the exception of glam metal, there is a surprising absence of sex in most heavy metal lyrics. Metal sings about the occult, Satan, war, violence, drugs, alcohol, substance abuse, politics, brotherhood, swords, fantasy novels, God, Jesus, and heavy metal itself more than it sings about sex. However, when metal does sing about sex, it often sings about gay sex.

With the genre's emphasis on brotherhood, it is not difficult to find a plethora of metal songs detailing bro bonding (take Manowar's entire discography for example). Usually these songs describe a connection formed over metal music itself and claims of an unbreakable bond are not uncommon. Manowar's "Gloves of Metal" is a good example of this common motif: "We wear leather, we wear spikes, we rule the night / With hands high fists fill the air / Against the world we stand / With hands high forever we'll be there / Gloves of Metal rule tonight."

Another prevalent theme in metal lyrics is violence, and while this can manifest in a variety of ways, it is almost always targeted towards other men (bonus points if such violence relies on swords, steel, or other phallic symbols). Take "Equimanthorn" by Bathory for example: "Snarling breath upon your backs, I'm vengeance incarnate / Now it's time, the moment's come, stand up now, face my hate / See the fire in my eyes, the final light you'll see / I send you to the darkness with my sword of thunder and steel." Men dominating other men or forcing other men into submission is a common manifestation of violence in metal lyrics and can often have explicit sexual connotations, including most shockingly, anal rape: "My lamb and martyr, you look so precious / Won't you, won't you come a bit closer / Close enough so I can smell you / I need you to feel this / I can't stand to burn too long / Release in sodomy / For one sweet moment I am whole" (from "Prison Sex" by Tool).



When it comes to depictions of straight up sodomy in metal lyrics, they usually are for the sake of being subversive and anti-Christian. Being sodomized by Satan is a prime example of this and is especially prevalent in black metal. Examples include “Crown of Horns” by Cryptopsy—“Capricornus Rex in tenebris / I long to feel the dark caress / Of your cloven hooves / I seek the loving warmth of your anus / As I place my worshipful / Lips about your teats;” “Poisoned Atonement” by Demonomancy—“I bow before you, oh eyeless Lord for whom my bowels bleed;” “FBS”

by Goatwhore—“Ejaculate the semen that will corrupt / Oh! / Fucked. By. Satan / Loud! / Demon god, thrusting forth / This lustful act defile the pure;” “Angel of Sodomy” by Archgoat—“Sodomitic rituals of desecration / Lambs of hypocrisy, of Christian lies / Bow to blasphemy, in front of horned god;” and “Let There Be Sodomy” by Midnight—“Sodomy leather is skin / Let there be sodomy woman demon / Let there be cruelty let there be / Let there be sodomy.”

And of course, given the genre’s role as a provocateur, there are songs that are just gay. Take Tool’s “Stinkfist” for example: “Finger deep within the borderline / Show me that you love me and that we belong together / Relax, turn around and take my hand.” Or “All in the Family” by Korn: “And I’ll suck you! / And I’ll fuck you! / And I’ll butt-fuck you! / And I’ll eat you! / And I’ll lick your little dick motherfucker!.” And of course there’s “Jawbreaker” by Judas Priest, Rob Halford’s cheeky homage to cock: “And all the pressure that’s been building up / For all the years it bore the load / The cracks appear, the frame starts to distort / It’s ready to explode / Jawbreaker.”

So if all of this is true, why is metal one of the most homophobic music subcultures? If you didn’t believe me before, the answer lies in the title of this article: homophobia is gay. Many psychology studies have shown that people who are homophobic are more likely to be aroused by porn depicting same-sex couples of their own gender than non-homophobic heterosexuals and therefore, it makes a lot of sense that homophobic men are drawn to metal’s homoeroticism.

Another layer of irony lies in metal’s claim to be a subculture promoting individuality and ‘otherness’—a refuge for society’s deviants and outsiders. It’s hypocritical to paint yourself as a community offering asylum for social misfits and outcasts when in reality, the scene has forever been dominated by white, heterosexual men. If anything, the asylum provided by many metal subcultures is for racists, fascists, and bigots.

Terrorizer magazine pointed out that if the percentage of the male population who are gay is the seven percent it is reported as, then the Bloodstock main stage should feature at least eight gay men. The sad reality is that there are no openly gay men at all. As the heavy metal monoliths of the 80s move into retirement, if the genre has any hope for survival, let alone a mainstream revival, it will need to ditch its white heterosexual male superiority complex. At some point, metal needs to reconcile with the fact that it’s not a ‘Flying V,’ it’s a Flying D.



The Twilight Soundtrack

ALL FOR THE VAMPIRE MONEY

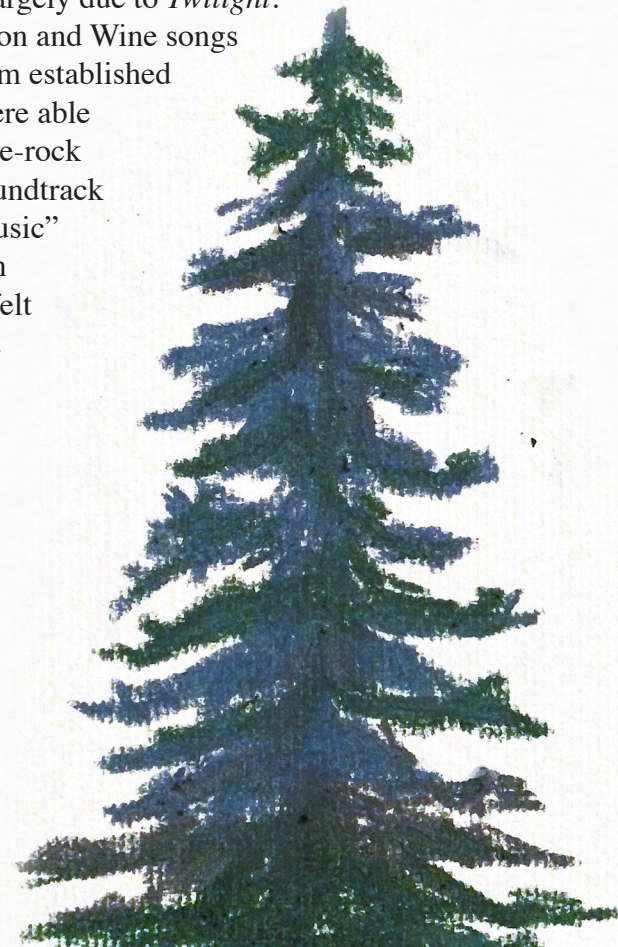
Written by Emily Putnam and Designed by Olivia Schumacher

Thanks to the release of Radiohead's *A Moon Shaped Pool*, 2016 was the year of my obsession with "The Numbers" (imagine: teenage girl, unfortunate haircut, ill-fitting sweater, tucked away behind a dilapidated cafeteria, earbuds firmly in). Because what else are you supposed to do in high school? The point is, I was very familiar with Thom Yorke's voice. 2016 was also the year of my first viewing of *New Moon* (imagine: teenage girl, semi-ironically but mostly with a near-nonsecular devotion, giggling at a sparkling Robert Pattinson). Thus, it was the first time I listened to "Hearing Damage". As a funky CGI wolf scrambled through thick woods, all I could think was: "Is that fucking Thom Yorke?"

Indeed, it was. Yorke, notorious perfectionist, self-described "uptight, catatonic [artist]", wrote a song for The Twilight Saga. And of course, it was magnificent! But the glory of the franchise's soundtracks has been discussed and recognized to death. What I wanted to know was: how on Earth did the series' music supervisor, Alexandra Patsavas (recall the delightfully hackneyed Grey's Anatomy soundtrack), get Yorke to write a song for *New Moon*?

The previous installment of the series, *Twilight*, featured a number of now beloved artists, from Iron & Wine (introspective, plucky indie folk) to Muse (science-fiction rock opera with indie rock influences). It wasn't as though Patsavas plucked these groups from obscurity, but for many of them, *Twilight* was what encouraged their cult followings. The popularity of Muse in the U.S. began with *Black Holes and Revelations*, as listeners strove to relive the iconic vampire baseball scene through "Supermassive Black Hole." Albeit reluctantly, bassist Chris Wolstenholme even admitted Muse's international success was largely due to *Twilight*. "Flightless Bird, American Mouth" remains one of the most popular Iron and Wine songs to this day (recall the prom scene, if you can bear to). Thus, the first film established the precedent of the "Twilight Bump", wherein lesser-known artists were able to develop mainstream popularity and become a part of the campy indie-rock canon—after *Twilight* fans were exposed to them. Reviewers of the soundtrack generally commended this phenomena for its ability to expose "real music" to the uncultured teenage girl: "Pushing forward-thinking indie rock on kids raised on the Jonas Brothers? I can't find fault with that." Others felt they suffered for it: "My first instinct was to... bitch about the fact that prepubescent girls across America would now be able to count Thom Yorke among their favorite artists." This sentiment that the interests of teenage girls are inherently puerile is certainly not new, and almost evokes hysteria – many of these reviews are similar to the media's response to fans of One Direction. Consider Jonathon Heaf's remark in GQ that "[Boy bands] turn a butter-wouldn't-melt teenage girl into a rabid, knicker-wetting banshee who will tear off her own ears in hysterical fervor when presented with the objects of her fascinations." Uh. Yeah.

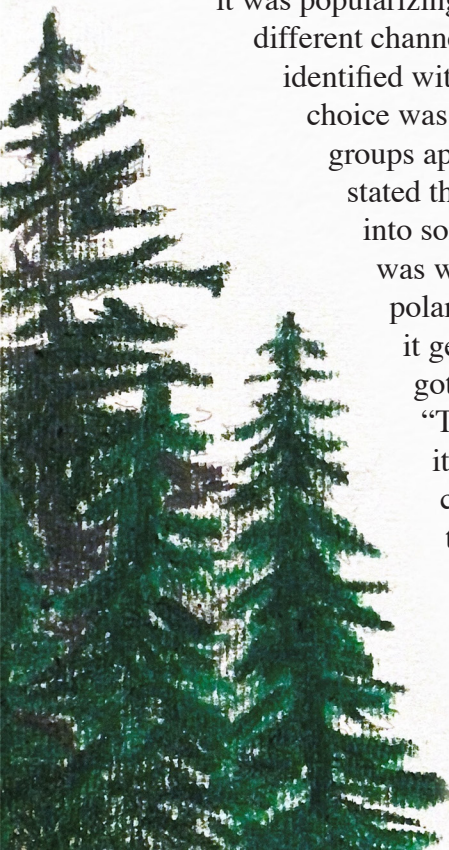
Another subset of reviews focused on the the series' exploration of disempowerment fantasy, abstinence porn, and anti-abortion



sensibilities. Its music certainly supplemented these ideas; if anything, *The Twilight Saga* illustrates how music can be used to alter audience response. For example, there are a number of inarguably disturbing scenes made romantic with some light indie pop (think: Bella finds out Edward is stalking her, but seems to like it). Music also functions to romanticize aspects of the franchise's characters. Bella's constructed feminine passivity, virginal purity, and eventual motherhood are also her martyrdom – but with a coy Sea Wolf song in the background of her loss of autonomy, viewers know she's happy to be martyred. It's important to consider why these characteristics of the films are appealing to women, but also to realize the fact they are has its own significance. In an industry primarily occupied with male fantasies, even reductive, insulting escapism that is *for* women matters. Really, it matters because women were the ones creating the stories and supplementing their meanings with music. Patsavas had already established herself as a soapy-soundtrack virtuoso by the first film, and Stephanie Meyer's taste for Muse, Linkin Park, and Radiohead determined the direction of the soundtrack. Their guidance, along with that of Livia Tortella of Atlantic Records, and Summit Entertainment's former president of marketing, Nancy Kirkpatrick, created this cohesive indie romance mixtape feel. I can appreciate that, despite its complicity in convincing me I'm okay with Edward stalking Bella in that stupid Volvo.

A large part of *The Twilight Saga*'s commercial success was due to its transcendence from the realm of film – it was the soundtrack, the merchandising, MySpace, the extensive updates on Stephenie Meyer's website, the events, the onslaught of MTV promotional materials, and the constant fan interaction these strategies facilitated. *Twilight* became an immersive experience. Because the first film came out when indie rock was entering the mainstream (and therefore appealing to relevant audiences), massclusive marketing, a tactic where products are distributed to the masses through the language of gatekeeping fans, was especially effective. The soundtrack made the films feel as though they were made specifically for each consumer, when they were really made to appeal to as many consumers as possible. The franchise didn't need huge musical names to drum up interest – it already had that. Its artists' indulgent obscurity only emphasized the sense of exclusivity that was vital to marketing the films; the mixtape feel was in many ways manufactured to serve marketing purposes.

The selling power of soundtracks had already decreased by the time the first film came out with the emergence of single-track downloads, so the *Twilight Saga*'s music marketing approach (whether it was popularizing the singles themselves or promoting the film) was forced to go through different channels. Another aspect of massclusive marketing was appealing to those who identified with subcultures – and in the case of a vampire franchise, the most obvious choice was goths. One of the most emphatic critics of this strategy was one of the groups approached for the soundtrack, My Chemical Romance. Frontman Gerard Way stated that “Originally, what we did was take goth and put it with punk and turn it into something dangerous and sexy. Back then nobody in the normal punk world was wearing black clothes and eyeliner. We did it because we had one mission, to polarize, to irritate, to contaminate. But then that image gets romanticized and then it gets commoditised.” This is... a lot. But, he has a point – *Twilight* did distort goth and punk imagery to appeal to wider audiences. One blog, cleverly titled “*Twilight Sucks*” argues that *The Twilight Saga* is not gothic literature due to its avoidance of the themes of dark romanticism and transcendentalism that characterize iconic gothic works like *Dracula*. Essentially, the vampires are too sparkly to be goth – but just un-sparkly enough to stand for goth and punk subcultures, appealing to audiences who want to dip their toes in without going full Anne Rice. My Chemical Romance's “Vampire Money” was a criticism of *Twilight*'s reimagining of goth and arguably, of groups that compromised their artistic vision for the titular Vampire Money – in other words, “[sold] their souls to *Twilight*.” That's Muse's Wolstenholme again, who had a lot to say



about The Twilight Saga, but mainly, “You have to take every opportunity you get [as an emerging band].” Even if that means abandoning your creative proclivities to write a song that plays while Kristen Stewart wrestles with a mountain lion.

Twilight established a transition from soundtracks featuring hit artists to ones focusing on supplementing narrative meaning, whether that be through lyrics or atmosphere. In the same way indie rock made stalking romantic, the instrumentals used accentuate the franchise’s tendency towards erasure. The Twilight Saga did not exist in a vacuum, unaware of its influence; creators chose which musicians and actors to empower (and with that, which audiences) via the Twilight Bump. It’s not shocking that these individuals are predominantly white.

In a similar vein, creators chose to write a story that establishes a divide between respectable, religiously self-denying white vampires and animalistic, dangerous, emotional and sexualized Indigenous creatures. I’m not accusing The Twilight Saga of being sophisticated enough to purposely manipulate audiences, but at the very least it exploits Indigenous groups, utilizing the parlous tropes that define them in Hollywood (and therefore our cultural understanding) for marketing reasons. Consider *Twilight*’s insistence on applying an alluring, mysterious instrumental as Bella uncovers Quileute secrets. It starts quiet, peeking out from behind crashing waves. Jacob leans in close and says, “I’m not really supposed to say anything...” and the music becomes a low drone. Then it suddenly swells, anxious and haunting, as he alludes to the truth. Another eerie track plays as Bella researches the tribe further. This approach blatantly involves viewers in colonial fantasy – discovering magical Native Americans is a trope that sells. The soundtrack creates the sense that viewers are about to be in on a strange and whimsical secret, uncovering the depths of an obscure, mystical people. Soundtracks have been used to shape cultural understanding of Native Americans for decades, but *Twilight* doesn’t stop at contributing to viewers’ understanding of Indigenous groups, it actively evokes stereotypes to garner audiences. And didn’t this strategy work?

The Twilight Saga’s marketing digs its chipped nails into your most tender flesh; first, it gets you by pervading your every point of interaction with the world, and finishes you off by sneaking its messages into your subconscious the best way films can: through music. Critics expressed the sentiment that the franchise’s use of music ushered in a new era of soundtracks, but I disagree. The Twilight Saga uses music to perpetuate stereotypes and manipulate audiences just as much as any other box office film. It’s difficult to reconcile *Twilight*’s influence and its demonstration of cultural problems, but important to remember that these aspects of the franchise are just that: a representation of issues that affect real people. I hate to share in any school of thought with lamenting Radiohead fans, but The Twilight Saga did expose my friends to “15 Step”. It was a fun indulgence for women that came along during a time when fun indulgences for women were consistently denigrated. It’s a shame that much of *Twilight*’s criticism is reflective of that rather than in reference to areas where it legitimately falls short.



Young, Queer Boys & Female Pop Stars: A Relationship That Transcends Generations and Isolation

Written by Adrien Ceja & Designed by Jordan Masterson

It was 2009. I was 6 years old sitting in the backseat of my parents' car. We were driving on the freeway, and all of a sudden I heard a sound. 'Mum mum mum mah' filled the space around me while I was traveling 70 miles per hour. I heard the sound a few more times, and then the lyric 'I wanna hold 'em like they do in Texas, please' captivated my attention. 13 years ago I turned into a Little Monster, and am still one to this day.

Me singing "Poker Face" by Lady Gaga on the freeway while passing through the city of Santa Clarita is something I always go back to. Maybe it's because it is the first time I remember being excited about music, or maybe it's because I knew the icon, legend, and mother of all slays Lady Gaga would eventually become by the time I was 19 years old. I knew just at 6 years old I had a connection with her, but I could not put into words why or how—and I wouldn't actually know until I was 18 years old.

I am a man who likes other men, if it wasn't obvious by the opening anecdote, and since I was 8 years old I think I knew those feelings rang true. Honestly all I remember from that period of my life was having a crush on the actor who played Max on *Wizards of Waverly Place*. Those feelings only grew stronger over time, but they were also kept to myself. People speculated, but I did not actually tell anyone about me being gay until 2 days after my high school graduation when I told my group of friends. I still remember the date in my head: June 11.

I felt restricted. That restriction loosened up as I got older, but at one time or another my mind, eyes, hand, and tongue were all trapped by my own doing. I felt isolated, as if I was trapped in a locked room I repeatedly tried to escape from but kept getting the code wrong.

Some remarkable musicians helped me while I was trapped in that room: Taylor Swift, Britney Spears, Avril Lavigne, Lady Gaga, Lorde, Lana Del Rey, Katy Perry, and Adele. All of these women have at least one song you probably know the chorus of. They are pop legends and they dominated the radio in the 2010s. Or maybe they held a bigger role in your life than just listening to them in passing. For me these were the musicians in whom I found comfort and solace. When I was busy thinking of the fact I would only hang out with the girls at recess while the rest of the boys would hang out with each other, I would find joy in these pop icons' music. They brought me peace and a place to reside without actually having to confront myself.

Gen Z was not the first generation where young queer boys like me found comfort in female pop stars. Judy Garland in the 1940s brought much needed relief to a world dealing with the aftermath of a cruel war. Janis Joplin, Aretha Franklin, and Diana Ross in the 1960 started the trend of women in Hollywood breaking the mold of the perfect straight white woman star. Cher and Barbara Streisand in the 1970s each sprung their own musicality and

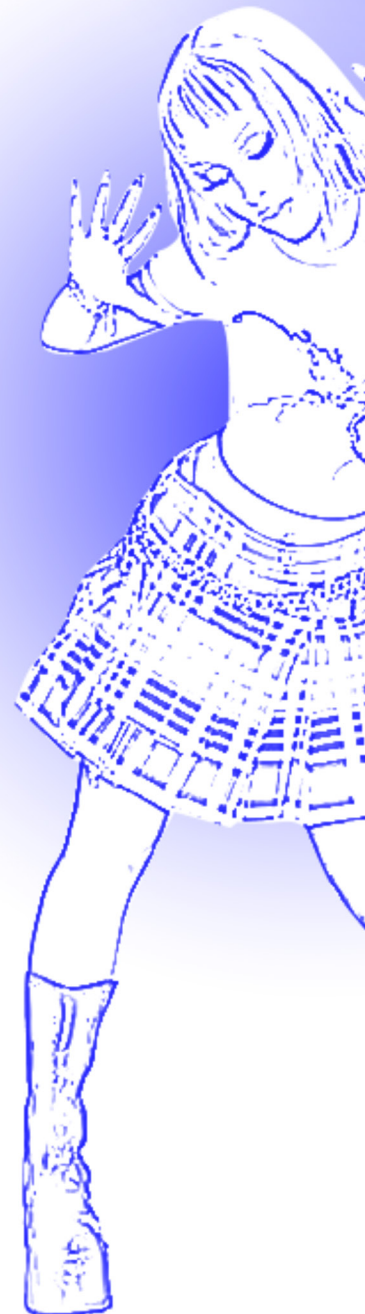


vision into a rapidly growing relaxation of society. Madonna, Janet Jackson, and Whitney Houston in the 1980s sparked the mainstream spread of dance-pop, which is still felt 40 years later. Mariah Carey, Alanis Morissette, Gwen Stefani, Selena, and Shania Twain in the 1990s expressed defiance through lyrics that created a space for future women to speak their minds through their music. Beyonce, Christina Aguilera, and Amy Winehouse in the 2000s sang with voices that can make an angel weep out of mesmerization. Ariana Grande, Rihanna, and Nicki Minaj in the 2010s embraced a vocal/rap delivery about their lived experiences to empower numerous people. And now Billie Eilish, Olivia Rodrigo, Megan Thee Stallion, and Doja Cat in the 2020s are all taking inspiration from past decades and creating a Gen Z voice that speaks its mind in creative ways.

These artists were relatable, whether that be the persona they held, the lyrics they wrote, or the way they were viewed in the press. People found themselves in these women, in particular queer men—young boys who, like me, did not know why they had feelings for other boys growing up. Having the realization a decade later that you probably liked that one boy in elementary school because you would always want to sit next to him in class certainly does hold a lot of weight.

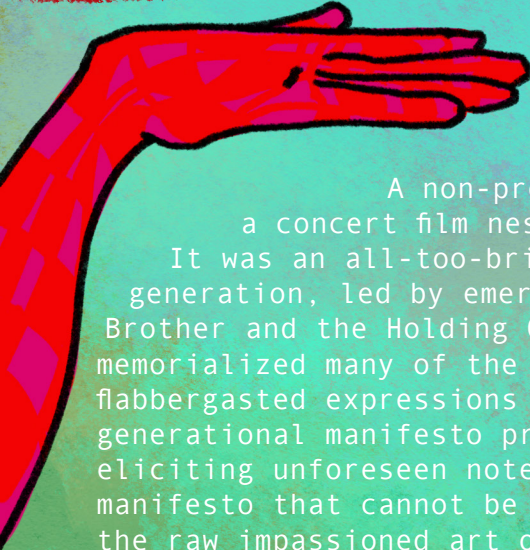
I wanted to disguise myself from this thing I felt everyone could see in me. I thought they knew I didn't have a close male friend in my life, and the self consciousness my young self felt caused me to bury the feelings deeper. I just wanted to feel joy. The type of joy everyone else seemed to have. I thought I had to force myself to go hang out with other boys who I didn't feel like myself around. I remember sometimes looking over at them and thinking of myself over there with them. I also wanted to be well liked by everyone because, in my head, if I was liked by everyone, then they would forget to think about the part of me that was different. They would not wonder why I was the only boy in a class of 25 students who didn't sit with the other boys. They would not think to ask why I liked watching *Shake It Up*, when only "girls" watched that kind of show. They would not have these things in their mind if I was polite, got good grades, and behaved. And that's what I did.

Pop music is the same. The reason why so many young queer boys gravitate towards women in pop music is because pop music, at its core, is supposed to be well received and evoke joy. Whether that joy is already felt, or is being sought, pop music centers around euphoria. And young queer boys want to feel that. I cannot speak for all, but I would say most of us felt isolated compared to our straight male peers. We did not feel the typical American school dream. You would have a crush on a girl in elementary school and your friends would tease you. You would go on your first date in middle school and maybe have your first kiss before ninth grade; if you didn't you were a loser. You would have a girlfriend in high school and go to the dances together, slow dancing to the love song of the year. I did not have that. I did not fucking have that and I am still pissed about it. I thought about it every day when I would go to school. I would see couples together at a table and fire would burn behind my eyes. My irises blazed once I saw them because that should be me. Why did no one ask me out to prom with a huge, stupid sign during lunch with everyone watching? I would have hated it but still: I wanted that and I never got it. And that is why I enjoyed listening to so much pop music when I was younger. It distracted me from the bitter jealousy I held for the experiences I knew I would not get to live out. Pop music gave me an outlet for all of my emotions, and I only have those artistic women to thank. So this is eight year old me thanking all of you for making me feel safe, and myself, within your music.



Not your Dad's Dusty Records: Monterey Pop Music Festival (1967)

written by marwa nauman



A non-profit (Californian) organization, The Foundation, produced a concert film nestled in the sweet summer rays of 1967 at Monterey Bay. It was an all-too-brief glimpse into the unfiltered utopia of the flower power generation, led by emerging artists such as the Jimi Hendrix Experience, Big Brother and the Holding Company, and Hugh Masekela. This rare artifact not only memorialized many of the performers' legendary styles, but also the audience's flabbergasted expressions upon the revelation of a generational manifesto. A generational manifesto proliferated by the enrapturing gyrating of Jimi Hendrix eliciting unforeseen notes from his soon-to-be enkindled guitar. A generational manifesto that cannot be expressed through simple spoken words, but only through the raw impassioned art of musical expression, namely the festival's opening song San Francisco (Be sure to wear flowers in your Hair) by Scott McKenzie. For just this moment, for just this second, all is well. The music is persuasively energetic and collective. The crowd is congenial and drugs are easygoing. A gentleman in a dusty, baby blue top hat crosses the street as a brunette blows bubbles into the air. As Mama Cass (a singer of the Mamas & the Papas) watches Janis Joplin's soul-wrenching performance of "Ball and Chain" with Big Brother and the Holding Company, I find a childish joy in noticing our shared look of awe. A majority of the film focuses on diverse multicultural artists, such as Otis Redding and Ravi Shankar, that are not typically considered when people picture the countercultural music of the late 1960s and its radiating influence on the rock music scene. The zeitgeist of the 1960s is not just found in your dad's dusty record collection, but rather exists ubiquitously in forgotten footage and various unrecognized sampling

The film maintains a frankness with its viewers by consistently cutting to footage of festival goers, local law enforcement, and the stage building crew, especially in the first ten minutes. "Oh, groovy, a nice sound system at last." A blonde teenager beams as they speak about the musical "vibrations" that will radiate from the festival headliners tonight, referring to the festival as a "love-in." It's funny to think that this woman is probably someone's grandmother by now and has replayed these memories countless times to others. D.A. Pennebaker, the director of Monterey Pop and Bob Dylan: Don't Look Back, ensures that the fame of the major headliners does not eclipse the contextual importance of this gathering. In a brief interview, the police chief states that he is concerned about the potential influx of Hells Angels outcast motorcyclist group and the Black Panthers. While he initially mentioned hippies as a group of concern, he promptly corrected himself after a quick glance at the camera. The distinct double standard



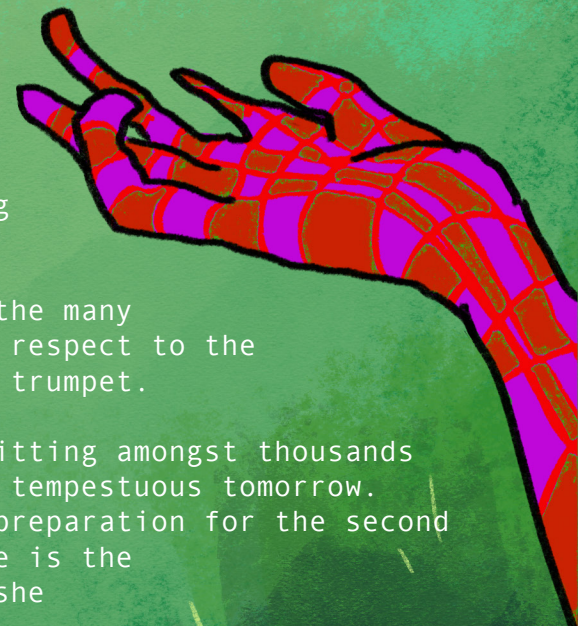
DESIGN:
DAVID
PEREZ
NYQUIST

for different counterculture organizations is made crystal clear in a two minute shot. Since this was the first music festival of its kind to attract 50,000 people from around the country, the chief expressed concerns about a food shortage and shelter accommodations. All of these concerns are addressed by a multitude of later shots which show people sharing food and waking sluggishly from sleep bags strewn on morning dew speckled grass. Pennebaker even includes two distinct shots of a Hells Angels leather clad member sitting in the crowd.

While the intercut audience cameos and brief interviews illustrate the festival's atmosphere, the musical performances are the true caviar of the film. The hypnotic performance of Hugh Masekela and his band absolutely astounded me with their elucidate South African jazz slipping into the crevices of my ear drum. His strong profile, trumpeting catalytic notes, is memorialized on film amongst the darkness of the night. The band inundates the screen, transcending to a plane of unadulterated suave vocals. His music is multifaceted in its wordless approach to anti-apartheid songs, such as "Bajabula Bonke (The Healing Song)," and the engulfing pleasure of being alive. Many of his vivacious compositions are still heard today as many contemporary artists continue to sample his distinct jazz rhythms. For example, Earl Sweatshirt, Masekela's nephew, sampled "Riot" for his song "Riot!" and "Yei Baa Gbe Wolo" was sampled in Baby Keem's "Booman." At the time of the festival, Masekela, age 21, had recently moved to New York City after receiving a scholarship to the Manhattan School for Music. He had been exiled for anti-apartheid activity after the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960 in which white policemen opened fire on a peaceful protest group, killing more than 200 Africans in a mere two minutes. His vibrating performance on the Monterey Pop stage marked a major turning point in his career with the following release of a second album, *The Promise of a Future* (1968). The sixth track, "Grazing in the Grass," peaked on the Billboard charts in August 1968 and was sampled by a wide variety of artists, including on "Jimi" by Slightly Stoopid and "Every Morning" by Sugar Ray. The widespread influence of Hugh Masekela's robust South African jazz across genres is visible by the many artists who continue to sample his discography and pay respect to the fearless zeal of rebellion embedded within his blaring trumpet.

The camera cuts to a desolate shot of a teenage girl sitting amongst thousands of row seats. A silence hangs as the dawn draws in the tempestuous tomorrow. She appears to be wiping the seats down with a rag in preparation for the second day of the music festival. The film crew ask her why she is the one cleaning and a slight smile arises on her face as she replies, "I guess we're just lucky."

"This is where it all - ends." The Who explode "My Generation" on stage with bursts of pastel florals, fringe, and bold ruffles to the delight of many awaiting smiles. Keith Moon, the drummer, goes absolutely reckless. The camera initially rotates between close-ups of each band member, but later converges on Moon as he seamlessly loses countless drumsticks yet maintains the rabid tempo with guitarist Pete Townshend. Moon's face continuously contorts in a rush of





satisfaction as his head rocks to the rhythm of his Premier Red Sparkle double-bass kit (one of the numerous double kits Moon will ardently abuse). The set concludes with utter annihilation as Townsend smashes his guitar neck into the rented amplifiers while the singer, Roger Daltry, spins at center stage as the stage managers rush on stage to salvage the equipment. The last man standing, Keith Moon, amidst fog and destruction continues playing until a smoke bomb knocks over the snare drum.

Despite the British Invasion peaking in the mid-1960s (made apparent by the presence of the Animals & the Who at the festival) it only represents a miniscule cross section of the overall rock n' roll sphere of influence. The seismic performance of Otis Redding with Booker T. & the M.G.'s and The Mar-keys, establishes itself as the focal point of the documentary with their performance of "Shake" and "I've Been Loving You Too Long (To Stop)." Never have I ever experienced such an exuberant energy emanate so organically. Rock n' roll is not just based on the foundations of your middle-aged dad's record collection of Led Zeppelin and the Rolling Stones, but also on the hair-raising performances of a diverse collective of 1960s musicians, such as Otis Redding and Hugh Masekela. The audience roars with a reciprocal vivacity as Redding vibrates, akin to a hummingbird, to the building tempo of the drums. The camera zooms out as the band commences "I've Been Loving You Too Long (To Stop)" to display a shot of the full stage and audience as he asks if this is the "love" crowd and states "we all love each other, don't we?" to which the crowd emphatically yells. The dark negative space surrounding the stage blends ambiguously with the rest of the screen and almost leaks into the present viewing moment.

Smoothly, the camera slips behind Redding and the spotlight fuses with his outline, simultaneously blinding us and highlighting the tranquil energy he emanates. Pennebaker manages to capture the wholesome energy of the moment creating an interpersonal exchange between viewer and performer that transcends decades. The camera constantly focusing in and out elicits the sensation of a dreamy memory of childhood past. The burgeoning raw emotion climaxes when he turns towards the camera to ask the drums to repeat a riff three times and jolts his body, accompanied by the appreciative roar of the "love" crowd. The aftershocks of Otis Redding's riveting performance can still be felt through the samples used by top charting artists of all eras: Kanye West in "Gone," The Beatles in "Drive My Car," Led Zeppelin in "The Lemon Song," King Krule in "Comet Face," and Wu-Tang Clan in "Wu-Tang:7th Chamber." Otis Redding's earth-shattering performance at Monterey Pop cemented his influence and a sincere relationship with not only the "love" crowd, but to music audiences throughout history.

The final headliner, Ravi Shankar, hypnotizes the audience into a cumulative serenity with Raga Bhimpalasi as the music festival draws to an end and the familiar bittersweet rumblings of last goodbyes begin to engulf your throat. A last cigarette is smoked in the delightful warmth of a sleeping bag. A capuchin monkey perches on a shoulder, munching on a sweet date, "LOVE" painted in red across its forehead. Passerbyers filter past the camera as we viewers submerge into the crowd. The sheriff turns away from the camera, followed by a cheeky cut to a Hells Angels leather jacket. A flower-adorned hat man stoically passes out flyers

with bold headlines of Indian and Japanese Music. Fingers drum rhythmically to the taal (rhythm) of the sitar while various heads loll in attentive bliss. A person erratically shakes their whole body to the swift beat of the tablas (hand drums). Jimi Hendrix bobs his head to the pulsating sitar riff as Pete Townshend too languidly shakes his head in a wide-eyed daze. Even one of the sound girls gleefully rocks her head to the strum of Shankar's sitar. All are transfixed by the laya tempo of Shankar's sitar and tabla player, Alla Rakha, who are accompanied by the sonic undercurrents of the raga (melody) played by the steady tanpura player Kamala Chakravarty. Many artists have since sampled Ravi Shankar's discography from Cypress Hill in "Funk Freakers" to Tank's "I Love Them Girls (Timbaland Remix)."

The laya temp begins slow at around 15 bpm and gradually builds to an astounding 400 bpm. The unprecedented fusion of improvised rock n' roll and rigorous North Indian classical music occurs with similar frequency to a solar eclipse so to have live footage of their meteor collision is a genuine gift from the gods. Although North Indian classical music takes years of practice to master due to its rich cultural significance within South Asia and Hinduism (via Vedic arrangements), there is still a degree of improvisation within the cyclical raga. The taal consists of a sequence of accented (taali) and unaccentuated (khaali) beats which are referred to as the theka. Within the theka contains the sam, the strongest beat that must stay consistent with all iterations of the specific raga. The tabla player can play around with the taal within the entirety of the raga and create a playful and intimate rendering of the composition. This improvisation can be seen in Shankar and Rakha's cheeky correspondence onstage, each building against the other to evoke a crescendoing collective joyous epiphany. The crowd erupts into an unanimous standing ovation of ecstatic cheers and child-like grins. The wrathful anger of raging against the establishment, which thrives on the pain and suffering of the Vietnam War, dissolves effervescently into the cleansing tides of passionate tenacity which belongs to the hopeful.

Monterey Pop is available for streaming on HBO Max and available on DVD and Blu-Ray by The Criterion Channel at Barnes & Nobles.



LISTEN TO MY SPOTIFY PLAYLIST

HOW STREAMING AFFECTS MUSIC CONSUMPTION AND CULTURE

Written by Elizabeth Nguyen & Designed by Savannah Rice

At the creation of this article, Spotify Wrapped season is nearing, looming upon us trembling listeners, fearful of what our wrapped will unearth. Maybe you have listened to Your Best American Girl by Mitski 100+ times this well (if this is you, I hope you are doing well). Or maybe you're embarrassed that you enjoyed that new Drake album a bit too much. Whatever it may be, these events where our streaming overlords decide to broadcast our intimate listening habits are cultural moments. They mark the dominance of this particular mode of consumption and illuminate the relationship between the artist, the consumer, and the third party of the streaming platform. But to better understand this relationship of streaming, I will meditate on how we consume music, the creation of intangible queer and POC musical spaces, and the oppression of artists' subjectivity.

1. We're All Psychic: Music Consumption Through Psychological Means

For many artists, whether it be in music or not, their art is an extension of self—an exploration of identity, a specific moment in their life, or an expression of creativity. For Belgian-Egyptian songwriter Tamino Amir, this is no different. He often finds his music drawing from his Arabic roots, subconsciously incorporating Arabic scales. So in understanding art's inherent importance to sense of self, it is natural to ponder, "how can something so intimate be released and consumed?" Tamino Amir meditates on this fact in a recent interview:

"It's a strange idea that you release something, and it finds an audience, but numbers are quite abstract for me, it's only when you play for those people, when you feel the vibe, when you can feel what it's doing, that's when you fully experience it."

When an artist releases their work, they are often met with the dizzying reality that once their music is consumed, it no longer belongs to them. Even though the artist is the creator, the audience imbues their own meanings and memories into the work. The piece then becomes a thing of collaboration, alive, where the constructed meaning is transposed and re-molded in its consumption.

Beyond copyright law and beyond the didactic terms of ownership in the agreements artists make with their labels, the feeling of ownership has entered our sphere of consumption. Have you ever felt so connected to a song that it felt sewn into your heart? Or have you ever had a song permeate so many of your memories that it becomes an essential part of your sense of self? You know, that one song by that one obscure artist (that no one supposedly seems to know) is yours.

In our modern capitalist society, the rise of new technologies, and for the purpose of this article, streaming, has trumped legal ownership of "things." In the past, status in consumerism was driven by the incessant need for tangibility—to own a car, a house, or precious jewelry. And although physical ownership still exists, it is no longer the only component critical to consumption. We now have film streaming, audiobooks, online games, digital journalism, cryptocurrency, and other forms of consumption only available online. Now, it is psychological ownership that drives consumerism—a FEELING that something is MINE.

When we stream from Spotify or Apple Music, we are fostering this sense of ownership. We curate our

playlists meticulously to match a certain emotion, memory, or genre. These songs, in turn, become intensely intimate artifacts of ourselves. So, the song only belongs to your bedroom late at night when you're staring at the ceiling. Or in that smoky club, saturated and blinking with the hues and heat of a modern-day music commune. Or maybe a song functions as a bridge, a conversation keeper, between yourself and that random stranger at the party. Deeply personal, psychological ownership transposes our consumption of music from the object to the abstract.

The music-memory connection has always existed, but it is now less shrouded by collector's culture. Sure, we still have a few kitsch cults that enjoy record or DVD collecting (I personally prefer cassettes), but it's not how the mainstream consumes media. Even the most stringent record spinners will turn to streaming sometimes.

While this emotional connection to music used to manifest in tangible collections of CDs, cassettes, and records, with the rise of streaming services, these have been replaced with a sense of ownership forged solely through psychic means.

2. The Ephemerality of Streaming—a New Subversive Space

Ephemeral, streaming is transient. Instantaneous. We have more access to music today than at any other point in history. What that means, for artists, is an exceptional increase in reach. Streaming somewhat acts as a bypass for Queer and POC artists to enter larger modes of consumption. And in these larger audience ranges, marginalized consumers are more easily able to unearth music that makes them move.

Traditionally, only musical artists who assimilated to the ideologies of white supremacy and heteronormativity could break into the mainstream, and thus reach an exceptional state of visibility (this is not to discredit the work of Black and queer artists who were able to enter the mainstream and pave the way for the artists of today but to make a general comment of how artistic consumption is bounded by dominant spheres of oppression). Queer, POC, and other subversive scenes were relegated to the underground. To illustrate this, I would like to discuss how queer and POC aligning artistic movements were often barred from mainstream radio, forced to construct their own definitions of visibility at the margins.

Chicago House, and truly the house genre as a whole, was born in the Southside of Chicago. The genesis of the house genre was insurgent, a subversive movement that derived from Disco Demolition in which radio host Steve Dahl took to Comiskey Park and burned disco, soul, and reggae records. He cited their departure from "Godliness" to be the reason (basically if you were Black, gay, or anyone who sympathized with their music, you were out). Black and queer artists were forced to forge their own music community, creating a new genre in the process. So, Robert Williams opened "The Warehouse," a members-only gay club in 1977. Here, the Chicago music scene found a new beat, a new hedonism away from Dahl's ideology. It was a distinctly queer space, in the midst of a segregated city, where Black, queer, and trans people could partake in communion. In the Warehouse, marginalized bodies were able to negotiate and affirm their own identities within the radical genre of house.

And even though these physical, tertiary queer spaces are still of utmost importance in building community, with the advent of streaming, identity-affirming music can proliferate apart from underground, dissident venues. Black and queer and trans people can seek subversive spaces in the comfort of their own homes. Effectively, in the music realm, marginalized people no longer need to feel ownership over a physical space to survive. Oppressed folx can now take ownership of their identities digitally.

For example, online playlists have replaced the need for a physical or material mode of music

consumption. While in the past this was done with mixtapes on cassettes and CDs, with the rise in popularity of streaming services came the rise in popularity of the playlist. Playlists are for creating an atmosphere, undoubtedly a form of expression of identity. We make playlists for certain seasons, certain moods. We curate songs that scream to us salvation or songs that allow us to revel in our melancholy. We name these playlists, we share them with friends who also share the experiences we try to convey, and we integrate them into every waking minute of our lives. These playlists define the passing moments of our lives and our tastes; playlists express and empower our identities.

The medium of online playlist-making and the ephemerality of streaming compounded allows for a greater ability to take ownership of our identities through music. Identity-affirming music is now just at our fingertips-reaching outside of the mainstream is effortless. Queer and POC identities no longer have to be relegated to the underground or physical realm, but can permeate through our most personal spaces: in our car drives, on our walks through the city, and in our beds at night.

3. That's Not Yours: The Loss of an Artist's Subjectivity

In early 2022, Joni Mitchell joined Neil Young in removing their music from Spotify. She asserted, "I've decided to remove all my music from Spotify. Irresponsible people are spreading lies that are costing people their lives. I stand in solidarity with Neil Young and the global scientific and medical communities on this issue."

Neil Young spurred this decision as an act of protest against Spotify's \$100 million contract with Joe Rogan, a notorious far-right commentator who purports anti-vaxx sentiment. "They can have Neil Young or Rogan. Not both," Young contended. Young's decision was complicated by the legal terms of ownership with his publisher and record label but at its core, his action asserted his claim to the consumption of his own work, disallowing a streaming service that entitled Covid misinformation from also disseminating his music.

Yet in the fallout of his decision, this act of reclamation fell somewhat on deaf ears. Alongside the thousands of fans who spread the #CancelSpotify in support of Young came the counter trend of users claiming "Neil Who?" And in the day following, Spotify chose Rogan. To this day, when searching Neil Young and Joni Mitchell on Spotify, the only results populated are covers, a few demos, a few live recordings, and not much else.

I evoke this event because it is a clear illustration of today's mode of music consumption. First, Young and Mitchell's act of protest was birthed from an incessant need to reclaim one's own work. For them, Spotify was not merely a platform to release work but a ledge for advocacy-their meanings imbued in their work must be congruent with the disseminator. So, how could their work truly be theirs, in terms of the values they ingrained within, when the mode of consumption is antithetical to such? And although they succeeded in asserting their sovereignty over their own work, in the end, the cogs of the hyper-capitalist market chugged on. They may legally own their music but their ownership is flattened by the system. Spotify granted Rogan a platform for their own profit and what we, as consumers, have lost is Mitchell and Young's music, which arose from a slower period of music creation.

Streaming music perpetuates a one-size fits all, flattened logic where production is directly dependent on the mode of consumption. Artists get paid in what is called a "pro rata" model in which payout is determined in proportion to how an individual artist's streams stack up to other popular, out-performing artists in a given time period. What this means is that payout is privileged to top artists, already cushioned by their top label, and mid-sized artists are not able to get a fair share. This also does not allow fans to determine where their subscription dollars are doled out, leaving

recognition and payment in, solely, the hands of the “pro rata” model.

To make matters worse, streaming is a necessity for survival for artists. In order to succeed in the industry and to reach a wider audience, artists must submit themselves, professionally and artistically, to the streaming schema. That means that artists are often forced to forsake their creative integrity for choruses and melodies that will translate to the most possible streams. Effectively, subversion, challenging the status quo, and any semblance of artistic individuality is disincentivized and eradicated. Mat Dryhurst, an artist and a teacher at NYU’s Clive Davis Institute of Recorded Music in Berlin, laments this fact in a recent NPR interview:

One-size-fits-all is a very crude, barbaric approach to music. And actually, the internet and music might be a whole bunch more exciting if artists were given the tools to make the experience of consuming their work as unique as, arguably, the work is in itself

It is clear that the current streaming payout model smashes any semblance of subversion. It turns music into a good to be consumed, produced based on demand, and nothing more. I do not think that it is outrageous to assume that the creation of genres at the margins, such as Chicago House, would not have the same power, the same means, to proliferate as it has done before. An artist’s subject, their feeling of ownership and domination over the work they create, is desecrated under the rule of streaming platforms.

This is further compounded by the process of psychological ownership, or the feeling that a song is MINE. Music streaming, although it creates a stronger personal connection, risks rendering music merely a site of consumption under the current system. According to a 2020 study published by the American Marketing Association, when consumers attach their sense of self (such as through playlist-making), they also become attached to a brand as a consumer. In effect, the artist becomes a brand. And even though artists have always had to market themselves, this fact becomes bloated, compounded with psychological ownership and the music market status quo. Music streaming risks rendering music as merely a site of consumption.

Although streaming services allow for deeper reclamation of identity for the consumer, it also flattens music into a hyper-capitalist good—a reflection of the logic of the streaming market. Once an artist releases their music, it no longer belongs to them. It is merely an ephemeral good in the market, inhabiting a space where profit and consumer needs prevail. The exchange of music is no longer just a work of collaboration of meaning between the artist and the consumer. There is now an oppressive third party—the streaming status quo.

4. Taking up Space in an Consumption Culture That Denies Us

I would like to strongly emphasize that the oppressive nature of streaming is no fault of the listeners. We are all victims to a hyper-capitalist world, and it is a tragedy that neoliberal logic has bled into our most treasured cultural spaces. But as listeners, as artists, as creatives, as people who may exist on the margins, music will always remain a medium of liberation. Although we are bounded by the logic of the streaming market, the creation of new queer, trans, and POC spaces is in our hands. And just as queer, trans, and Black folx forged a new subversive tangibility in Chicago, we also have the ability to define our sovereignty, our musical and cultural ownership, in our online world.



LISTENING TO GIRLPOOL

LISTENING TO MYSELF

Written by Liv Bjorgum & Designed By Jordan Masterson

If the lump in your throat could speak,
its language would be Girlpool.

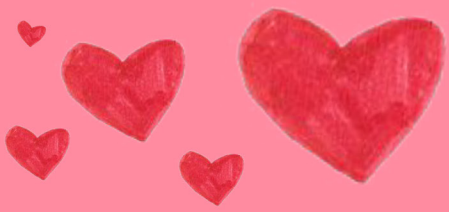
In 2013, Harmony Tividad and Avery Tucker, two high school students in Los Angeles, began making music together as Girlpool. With just a guitar, a bass, and two voices, they channeled inexpressible feelings into poetic and earnest songs. The discordance of early Girlpool songs reflects the songs' lyrical tracing of the mounting tension between innocence and lived experience in adolescence. Early Girlpool songs are minimal in form but not in emotion, metaphor-heavy yet straightforward. They carry insistency about the seriousness of emotion and the significance of what they encapsulate. Although they communicate feelings of insecurity, Girlpool songs harbor no hesitancy communicating these feelings.

The attempt to capture experiences that feel as large as the world itself in one album produces an inescapable angst. What Girlpool does with this world, and how they define it, changes from album to album. In the evolution of their albums, their perspective widens from their Angeleno adolescences as they strike out on their own in Philadelphia and then, ultimately, return to the world of yore as full-fledged adults. As a twelve-year-old girl listening to Girlpool for the first time, the very things I yearned to escape and understand lived beautifully in Girlpool songs. Never one for singing, I felt comfortable and even compelled to scream along to the lyrics. Girlpool remains a space I feel I can take up.

Critics have assigned Girlpool genres ranging from dream pop to folk to indie rock. Some genres projected onto Girlpool, like singer-songwriter and punk, are more identities and philosophies than musical categories. The real lesson might be that category designation is entirely contextual. Genre, as many wield it today, depends on the creation's time and place and the identity of the creators as much as on actual musical content. For example, who gets to determine why instrumentation might be more simple? Does honesty mean naivete? Does stripped-back songwriting indicate a lack of technical skill? No. Early Girlpool songs were often described as simple. However, their ability to craft songs of pure emotion in so few words, in such a precise and cutting manner, reveals their refined artistic voice.

Likewise, critics often analyze art made by women and transgender individuals as being about gender by virtue of their makers' identities. Art made by young people often becomes a reflection of their innocence. Girlpool sung high school





and childhood because it was what they knew. In a 2014 interview with Rookie Mag, Tucker and Tividad explained their mixed feelings about their work being viewed solely as feminist just because it explored gender roles. Their statements evince the uneasiness behind the now-popular sentiment that the personal is political. Whose existences become political? Such a categorization creates an in-group and an out-group, the normal and the politicized. When something is your reality, it feels reductive of its unique impact on your life to describe your existence as solely political, yet it is also frustrating (and impossible) to pretend that it does not affect your outlook. It is a piece of your reality and informs the way you think, but it doesn't make you easily categorizable. This is part of Girlpool's refreshing perspective. Within a world bent on classification, their songs claim autonomy over experiences and do not pressure reconciliation of all parts of the self. Even as Girlpool's sound changed, this ethos continued to inform their music. You can have a gentle voice and still stand your ground. Your deepest thoughts can sound pretty or gritty.


Girlpool fans, so full of love but searching for a place that will nurture it, can plant it in each other. On the song "Chinatown," "The mirror's reflection pushes me further away / If I loved myself, would I take it the wrong way?" At the show I attended, these lines evoked one of the most impassioned responses from the audience. So many connected with its revelation of the underlying anxieties surrounding such a love's release. My dear friends McKenna Blackshire and Natalia Girolami arrived in my life when the world had already become big-for the first or umpteenth time. Connecting over Girlpool added another layer to our relationships.

Both Natalia and McKenna recognized something they felt but could not communicate reflected in Girlpool's music. Natalia has also been listening to Girlpool since middle school. She told me, "[I felt] this inexplicable sadness that I couldn't articulate during my middle school years and Girlpool articulated that grayness...it was like a rock in my stomach, I felt small, and Girlpool articulated that feeling." Similarly, McKenna said, "I don't remember when I started listening to Girlpool more than the abstract feeling of being 16 and so angry at the world for no reason I understood...I always felt like their tunes could represent the things I couldn't put a name on." Girlpool reaches inside and finds something that is hard to name on your own.

I met Natalia in freshman year of college, but when I learned that we had both been avid Rookie readers and Girlpool listeners, I knew that our past selves understood each other, too. She saw Girlpool play with a close friend at the Irenic in San Diego in 2017, the year we graduated from eighth grade. Both Girlpool and Natalia's friendship with the person she attended the show with "made the world feel less lonely." Girlpool is about who you witness them with, whether they take the form of a CD in your mom's car or a band onstage.

I associate Girlpool with my beloved friend





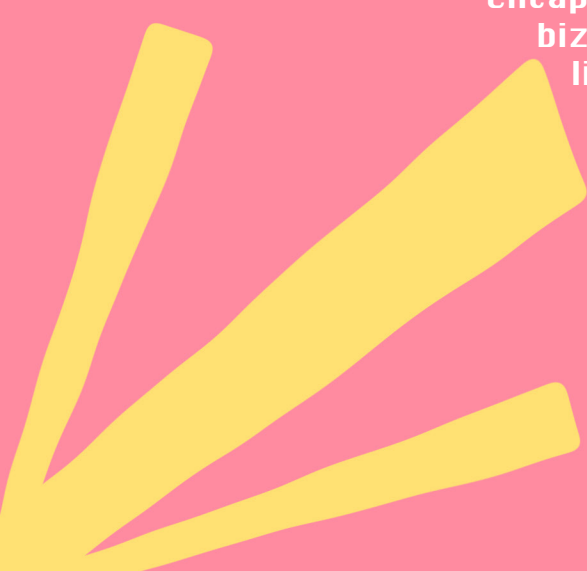
McKenna, who I became close with in junior year of high school. Music initially linked us, then movies, then fascinations with skateboarding, art, writing, and pictures—on our bedroom walls, on museum walls, on the screens of movie theaters.

We have spent uncountably many hours driving in her VW Bug together listening to music, *Girlpool* included. McKenna described walks in her hometown listening to “Before the World Was Big” and “trying to piece together the fragments of [her] adolescence.” Later, in college, she listened to “I Like That You Can See It” from the same album while walking to her best friend’s dorm. “[The song] always gave me an indescribable feeling of warmth: the feeling when everything makes sense, or it at least seems it might.” *Girlpool* propels you through the long walk that is all of life, promising that one day everything will fit into your world.

Natalia told me that attending the 2022 show with me was emotional “because I was once a girl and I shared my girlhood with someone so important to me, and now I’m not that girl, but I’m still super lost in life.” *Girlpool* can make you feel found. *Girlpool* recognizes you even when you have changed. Their songs tell us that it is alright to be lost, and with their catalog spanning our adolescences, we know that we have been jumbled around in the lost and found and turned up in the right hands before.

Of Natalia’s friendship with the person from middle school, she said, “We have grown apart...but we always find our way back to each other.” The same could be said for someone’s relationship with *Girlpool*. Its themes and sounds may weave in and out of your life, but the band never disappears completely.

McKenna referenced the idea of a line from the film *Magnolia* (1999): “I have so much love to give and I have no idea where to put it. I keep putting it in the wrong places.” She said, “I think that’s a sentiment I’ve carried for forever. *Girlpool* was definitely one of the first to name it for me, truly for me! In a way that made sense for the way I’d experienced my life as a girl in a strange world like this.” And what a strange world it is.



In two people, Avery Tucker and Harmony Tividad, *Girlpool* could encapsulate the strangeness of the world—both the actual bizarre nature of it and the way it could make you feel like a stranger to yourself. Was this girlhood? Was this adolescence? Was this adulthood? I have always been one for categorizing the eras of my life, yet the chronology of *Girlpool* albums and my years-long relationship with the band have shown me that it all comes back around; life ebbs and flows.

McKenna communicates *Girlpool* in a way I wish I could. She told me, “Music to me has always been everything, and it is especially intertwined with the way I’ve learned to love—*Girlpool* has been the

vessel of so much of my love in this world.”

I do not think I will ever talk about Girlpool in the past tense. A renewed appreciation for the connection Girlpool has brought subdued the sadness I initially felt when considering the band’s dissolution. On “Cherry Picking” from their debut album, “Lovers turn to strangers / Everyone always has to go.” People pass through, but you keep yourself. The Forgiveness song “Dragging My Life Into a Dream” begins, “I want my innocence back,” but a greater desire emerges as the song continues with “won’t you drag your life back into mine right now.” I may not want to be in middle school again, but to hold my past self. Girlpool offered me this tenderness before I had the perspective to give it to myself.

Girlpool is a diary entry that never made it out of my mind. Girlpool sings the feelings you try to swallow, that you try to bend around, that you are taught to carry with you, so that you can sit and feel the breeze for a moment. Girlpool excavates the unspeakable from your heart and sings it to you. Girlpool kisses the tender skin around a bruise. Girlpool is recognition even when the face in the mirror looks unfamiliar. Listening to a Girlpool album is like lying on the floor describing an emotion with my friends until I can understand it (something I did not feel comfortable enough to do when I first started listening to Girlpool at twelve). Girlpool heard me before I spoke up and its meaning has only grown as I use my words, too.



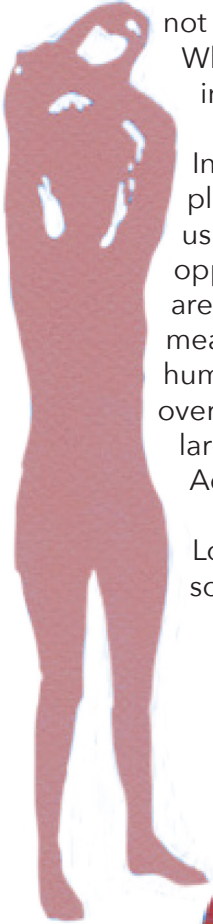


DANCE TO OUR DEATHS

Environmental Fears in Pop Music


Music can provide a couple minutes of escape from daily life, whether it's to feel joy, express love, or to let out some sadness - these days I do not feel the same tranquility. There's a thought in the back of my head that there are more dire and consequential things to worry about than whatever breakup some indie rock artist is talking about in their song's bridge. The biggest worry causing these panics has to do with the ground we all are standing on: preserving the integrity, safety, and life of our world and environment. But what if I told you that music, specifically pop, does not have to be defined by mindless melodies and seemingly surface level lyricism?

What if I told you genuine expressions of environmental concerns have been intricately woven into the heart of some of these popular songs all along?


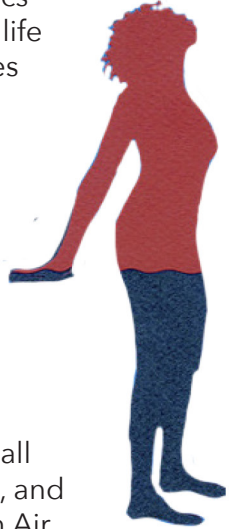


In Lorde's song "Fallen Fruit" off her 2021 album *Solar Power*, fear for our planet's future is the central message. In the chorus, Lorde sings, "You'll leave us dancing on the fallen fruit." There are two parts to this lyric that stand out in opposition: "dancing" and "fallen fruit." While independently dancing and fruit are innocuous and even sanguine symbols, when combined they adopt a brutal meaning. Dancing on top of fallen fruit is a metaphor for destroying nature through human action. Like dancing on fallen fruit, if individuals continue to carelessly tread all over nature, there will be no resources left. Assumed small offenses, such as littering, and larger transgressions, such as white male business owners' opposition to the Clean Air Act, both ravage the planet; however the damage is incomparable.

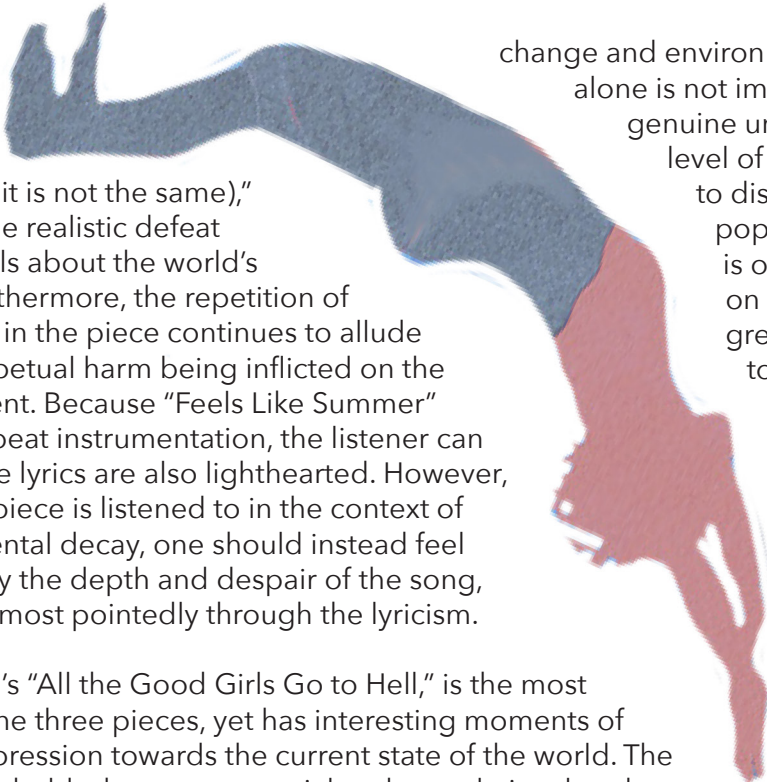
Lorde sees "Fallen Fruit" in a similar way to my interpretation of the song: "This is me sort of talking to my parent's generation, being like 'Do you know what you've done? How could you have left us with this?'"



Additionally, Lorde offers a different, more in-depth perspective to moments on the song as well: "It's me describing an escape to somewhere safe that takes place in the future when our world has become uninhabitable." According to Lorde, "Fallen Fruit" is dedicated to her parent's generation, questioning why they left Lorde and future generations in a position where they feel like they must escape because the world reaches a point of breakdown it cannot revert from.



Thematically akin to "Fallen Fruit," in "Feels Like Summer," Donald Glover (Childish Gambino) uses repetition and specific phraseology to convey a sense of helplessness towards the damage of the natural world. While there are more obvious references to the changing climate in the second verse, such as "everyday gets hotter" and "running out of water," it's the title of the song that holds the most covert and impactful meaning. The song never clarifies what time of year it is despite repeating the line "it feel(s) like summer." Because of global warming, there are many places today where it feels like summer in the dead of winter. Furthermore, these locations are more often than not places that are a home to large populations of economically disadvantaged people of color, many of whom make their livelihood in outdoor professions dependent on the changing seasons. The pre-chorus refrain expands on the pain from both individuals who are affected the most by climate change and the Earth's pain as the planet breaks down. Glover's wish for a change in our environmental situation is expressed through the line "I'm hoping that this world will change." However, the closely following line, "but it just seems



the same/(it is not the same)," conveys the realistic defeat Glover feels about the world's future. Furthermore, the repetition of the refrain in the piece continues to allude to the perpetual harm being inflicted on the environment. Because "Feels Like Summer" has an upbeat instrumentation, the listener can assume the lyrics are also lighthearted. However, when the piece is listened to in the context of environmental decay, one should instead feel haunted by the depth and despair of the song, conveyed most pointedly through the lyricism.

Billie Eilish's "All the Good Girls Go to Hell," is the most subtle of the three pieces, yet has interesting moments of candid expression towards the current state of the world. The pre-chorus holds the most essential and overt lyric related to environmental breakdown: "Hills burn in California/ My turn to ignore ya/Don't say I didn't warn ya." This line visually paints a picture of environmental destruction for the listener. The forest fires that occur in California are a clear depiction of the devastation caused by climate change. Additionally, by following this line with a phrase on ignoring this issue, Eilish is making a larger comment on



the ignorance, especially from those privileged enough to be ignorant, of the perpetrators causing the rising global temperatures that are devastating the Earth. While the environmental message may be subtle, Finneas O'Connell, brother, producer and collaborator with Eilish, stated something interesting in an interview saying, "I read somewhere that some fans think that 'All the Good Girls Go to Hell' is about climate change. I love that they think that." Despite the limited allusions to environmental devastation, fans of the song are still able to take away the warnings "All the Good Girls Go to Hell" touches on through listening and engaging with the piece.

While it is a good thing big artists like Lorde, Childish Gambino, and Billie Eilish are talking about climate

change and environmental fears in their music, listening alone is not impactful action. Passivity is the enemy of genuine understanding. Furthermore, there is a level of hypocrisy to pop music as a medium to discuss climate change. The popular music industry itself is one that was constructed on capitalism and corporate greed. Even if pop artists try to distance themselves from that fact, many of them contribute to environmental damage themselves. Private jets flown at leisure, music festivals, world tours, and album distribution have huge carbon footprints. While there are perceivable messages of environmentalism within pop music, the work must not and cannot stop there. What follows is exceedingly more



important: taking action to stop the damage being done to the Earth. Write to politicians who oppose essential environmental legislation, take the extra five seconds to sort your waste into the correct bins, join climate groups, support environmental protests, and participate in civil disobedience if you must. The essential caveat to the fact that pop music can express genuine environmental concerns and warnings is that the depth of these messages is only as impactful as the listener's drive to make change from them. Listen to what these artists are saying, but do them one better: do not just write or sing about your environmental concerns. The world is in a catastrophic state and is worsening everyday. Everyone who is able must step up and work to make things right. The world depends on it.

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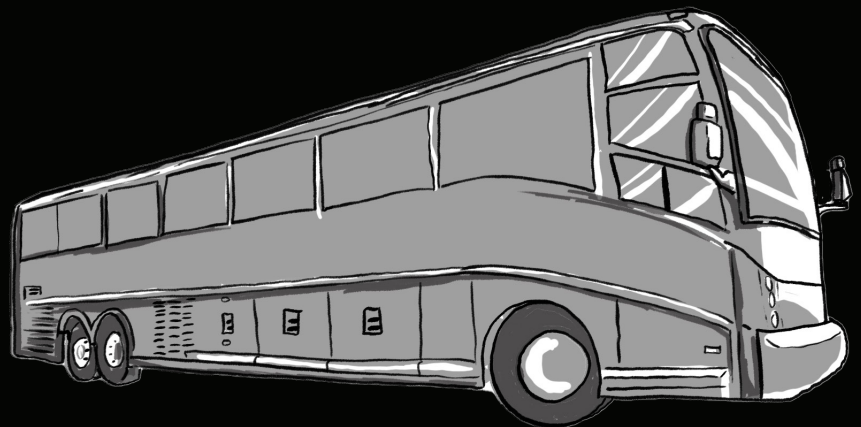
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