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MUSIC, POPULAR

Popular music is not only of interest in its own right as an important area of popular culture, but in times for which major documentation of homosexuality and attitudes towards it on the part of the lower and middle classes is lacking, it is one source of value to historical inquiry.

In the broadest sense, popular music includes everything that is not funded by elites for an elite, usually upper class or ecclesiastical, audience. This is usually art music (that is to say, sonatas, symphonies, lieder, operas, etc., and their equivalents in non-Western music). It is, moreover, useful to distinguish "popular" music from folk music—the older forms of anonymous, noncommercial expression. Popular music made use of mechanical means of reproduction of musical scores and text, beginning with song books and sheet music in the Renaissance. The commercialization of popular music appears first in cabaret and concert performances to which tickets are sold to a general audience, later in the sale of recordings.

Although some scholars believe that they can detect erotic motifs in instrumental music, this is certain only in the few cases where the composer has so indicated, as in the "Love Death" music from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*; it has been suggested that Tchaikovsky's *Symphonie Pathétique* has a homosexual theme. But the field of inquiry is in practice limited to songs with words, and the texts are the principal criterion of interpretation. In practice intonation (broadly defined to include lilt, timbre, and accentuation) is also important as a second level of meaning, which may supplement or even contradict the denotative one; sound recordings largely retain these intonational registers.

Early Indications. A fourteenth-century ordinance from Florence bans the singing of "sodomitical songs." Although the words and music of these are lost, the need to prohibit them attests that homosexuality was part of the bawdy repertoire of urban life as early as the late Middle Ages. The arrival of printing made possible the diffusion—no doubt with establishment encouragement—of a counterflow of antihomosexual songs. A characteristic example is an English single-sheet folio of a ballad, "Of the Horrible and Woefull Destruction of Sodom and Gomorra, to the Tune of the Nine Muses" (London, ca. 1570). In France during the time of Louis XIV satirical songs pilloried the homosexual peccadillos of Jean-Baptiste Lully, master of the king's music, and other notables.

In the nineteenth century the music hall saw a vogue for both male and female impersonators, leading to drag performances of songs appropriate to the opposite sex. In 1881 Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience*, incorporating a character based on Oscar Wilde, created the archetype of a gay man in popular music—though the character (Bunthorpe) was officially simply an "aesthete." In the inner cities of Europe and North America a few clandestine gay establishments offered sung entertainments, a tradition that survived into the second third of the twentieth century with the performances of Rae Bourbon.

Modern Commercial Popular Music. At the turn of the present century, the English-speaking world saw the emergence of a new category of music with mass appeal, the commercial popular song. What made this music distinctive was its broad availability through phonograph recordings, radio, and eventually sound motion pictures and television. Suggestive elements had been present in the nineteenth-century music hall, in vaudeville and minstrelsy, but these live entertainments lacked the standardization of style, tempo, and intonation found in songs diffused by a New York-centered grouping of highly

professional songwriters, collectively styled Tin Pan Alley, that were fixed in form and sold by the millions in recordings. Of course each recorded version would have its own standardization, but many songs retained in the popular mind the qualities given by the first major recording. Erotic suggestiveness appears in these songs not only in the lyrics, where the innuendo may be subtle, but in intonation, which served to bring out any underlying ambiguities. Consequently, it is necessary to listen to the audio recordings themselves to obtain the full effect.

A surprising number of examples escaped the tacit censorship that prevailed until the 1960s. One category is that of songs intended for one sex to be sung by a singer of the other—without benefit of the drag disguise as seen in the music hall. As early as 1898 John Terrell recorded "He Certainly Was Good to Me," and in 1907 Billy Murray longed for his absent sailor "Honey Boy," while in the 1930s Bing Crosby was to essay "There Ain't No Sweet Man (Worth the Salt of My Tears)." Ruth Etting sang a 1927 song about the charms of a woman friend, "It All Belongs to Me" (1928), and Marlene Dietrich became celebrated for such renditions as "I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face." There has been a tendency to interpret the female-to-male songs as more threatening than the male-to-female ones (as shown by censorship in later versions), corresponding to the fact that the sissy is more disapproved than the tomboy.

Some songs, such as Bing Crosby's 1929 "Gay Love," simply refrained from revealing the sex of the love object, leaving it to the listener's imagination. A few others were more explicit, such as Ewen Hall's thirties tune "Delicate Cowboy," who not only sang "gay" but preferred to ride side-saddle.

America's wars helped to stimulate a certain interest in buddy songs. Thus in 1922 the singer of "My Buddy" laments the departure of his comrade, reminiscing about "gay" times. As World War II ap-

proached this song was revived by Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, and others.

Other songs show mockery of gender conventions. The 1938 story "Ferdinand the Bull," about an animal that preferred sniffing flowers to fighting, became a Disney film and song. In *The Wizard of Oz* Bert Lahr played and sang the part of the cowardly lion, a dandified incompetent.

The interwar years saw the rise of a special category known at the time as "race records." These songs, whose verve made them increasingly attractive to white audiences, drew upon an existing genre of very frank black folk music, which they to some extent bowdlerized. Nonetheless, blues singers Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith recorded a number of clearly lesbian songs. In 1928 Rainey sang: "Went out last night,/ with a crowd of my friends,/ they must be womens/ Cause I don't like mens" ("Prove It on Me Blues"). As confinement was a common part of the black male experience, blues songs frequently dealt with jailhouse life, and occasionally referred to the necessarily homoerotic sexuality therein. Thus in one old song the prisoner asks the jailer to "put another gal in my stall," "gal-boy" being one of many Southern black slang terms for a sexually passive prisoner.

Stephen Foster (1826–1864), who began the tradition of distinctively American popular songs, was almost certainly gay—he ran away with another composer, George Cooper—but his lyrics sedulously avoid any hint of his orientation.

Such concealment is hardly characteristic of the work of Noel Coward (1899–1973) and the uncloseted Cole Porter (1893–1964). The witty lyricist of Broadway musicals Lorenz Hart (1895–1943) seems to have been gay, but it has not been possible to confirm rumors about George Gershwin (1898–1937). Although bisexual composer-conductor Leonard Bernstein (1918–) aspires to renown in the classical field it may be that his most lasting work is the music for *West Side Story* (1957).

The 1959 Broadway musical *The Nervous Set* featured an indirect but widely understood "Ballad of the Sad Young Men," which despite its gloomy perspective became popular in gay bars. Although musicals were much patronized by gay men, in order to retain their heterosexual audience they tended to be circumspect about sexual references. (Later, after the **Stonewall Rebellion**, the Reverend Al Carmines was to create a series of openly gay musicals in Greenwich Village, beginning with *The Faggot* in 1973.)

No survey of gay-related music would be complete without a mention of the phenomenon of "conscription," whereby a song without ostensible gay reference would become adopted by gay people as special to them and be widely played in gay bars as well as at home. Often such songs would deal with furtive love, such as The Lettermen's "Secretly," but the most famous one of the sixties was interpreted by homosexuals to deal with cruising and eye-contact: Frank Sinatra's "Strangers in the Night" (1966).

Rock and Roll. A new, youth-oriented popular music, rock and roll, developed in the United States in the mid-1950s out of a fusion of black rhythm and blues, gospel, doowop harmonic singing, white rockabilly, and other elements.

One of the black pioneers of rock and roll was the singer Richard Penniman ("Little Richard"), who appeared onstage wearing mascara eyelashes and a high, effeminate pompadour, having been kicked out of his home at age 13 for homosexuality. His cleaned-up 1956 recording of "Tutti Frutti" sold over three million copies, leaving an indelible mark on the new genre. A year later, however, Little Richard left rock and roll to become a Seventh Day Adventist and later denounced his own homosexuality, claiming to have "reformed" to heterosexuality.

When white singers such as Elvis Presley started recording black rock and roll tunes, radio took up the new music and it quickly came to dominate the

commercial mass market, displacing to a large extent the old Tin Pan Alley hegemony.

In its origins, however, rock and roll was a type of "underground" music. As such, it was not aimed at widespread radio airplay and was therefore less subject to censorship. This, however, does not explain the widespread airplay of Presley's big hit, "Jailhouse Rock" (1957), which contained a hardly disguised allusion to homosexuality in the context of a song containing black code-words for sex, most notably "rock" itself: "Number 47 said to Number 3/ 'You're the cutest jailbird I ever did see./ I sure would be delighted with your company/ come on and do the jailhouse rock with me!'" With the commercial breakthrough of rock and roll, such uncensored references quickly disappeared and were not to reappear until broadcast censorship standards had been seriously weakened in the upheavals of the late sixties and early seventies.

In the 1960s, rock and roll broadened out into "rock," incorporating such diverse elements as electrified quasi-folk music (among whose stars were the publicly bisexual or lesbian/gay singers Janis Joplin, Donovan, and Joan Baez), political protest songs, and complex "psychedelic" constructions. The decade was dominated by the British, who invaded American rock starting in 1964, led by the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. The Beatles released the sexually ambiguous "Obladie Oblada" on the "White Album" in 1968, while the Stones included some esoteric but clear self-ascribed references to homosexual prostitution in "When the Whip Comes Down" and some references (slightly disguised through the use of British slang) to oral sex by transvestites in "Honky Tonk Women" (1969). The very popular Doors opened up the previously taboo subject of anal intercourse in 1968 when Jim Morrison lyrically proclaimed "I'm a Backdoor Man."

The Explicit Seventies. In 1970 the Rolling Stones, trying to get out of a

contract with their record company, Decca, recorded "Cocksucker Blues"; Decca did refuse to release it, but the song became well known to the legions of Stones fans through bootleg recordings and discussions in the music press. Lyrics asked "Oh, where can I get my cock sucked? Where can I get my ass fucked?"

Following in the wake of "Cocksucker Blues" came a wave of explicit songs in the rock genre, some of which managed to get mass airplay and thus become major hits. The relaxation of broadcast censorship standards was no doubt related to the explosion of homosexual visibility which began with the 1969 *Stonewall Rebellion* and which brought discussion of homosexuality into all the mass media.

Among the first of these was "Lola" from the very popular British group The Kinks (1971). In this hit, which reached the number nine position on the best-seller charts, Ray Davies sang of a virgin boy who takes a fancy to Lola, only to discover that "I know I'm a man/ and so is Lola"; the discovery doesn't seem to lessen the boy's ardor at all. This eye-opener was followed by the American Lou Reed's 1972 Top Ten hit, "[Take a] Walk on the Wild Side," which recommended not only male prostitution but also transvestism. The campy Reed (who was presumed homosexual but who got married in 1980) and his producer on this record, the androgynous, married, and (according to a 1972 statement he later qualified) homosexual David Bowie, were major figures in a rock movement of the early seventies called "glitter rock," which was frequently associated with homosexuality in the music press. Another notable feature of the glitter movement was the New York Dolls, who appeared in drag and female makeup.

More in the mainstream of commercial rock was Rod Stewart's popular 1976 song, "The Killing of Georgie," an outright attack on "queerbashing." Elton John, who "came out" as bisexual in 1976, achieved considerable commercial success

with a 1972 homoerotic love song, "Daniel." In France Charles Aznavour's "Ce qu'ils disent" (1972) was a somewhat mournful ballad about a transvestite entertainer who lives with his mother. And at the end of the decade Peter Dinklage, lead singer for the supergroup The Who, was ready to release a solo album with a song called "Rough Boys" describing his erotic attraction to young toughs.

A footnote to the seventies was the 1978 "coming out" of Mitch Ryder, who had become a Top Ten singer in 1966 and 1967, and now discussed his experiences with anal intercourse in his album "How I Spent My Vacation."

Disco, Punk, and New Wave.

Even as rock music was turning its attention to homosexuality, however, the gay audience was turning away from rock. As early as 1972, disc jockeys in gay bars and clubs were putting bits and pieces of black dance music together into a new genre, disco, which at first had little appeal to heterosexual whites. Disco music featured mechanical studio productions using canned rhythm tracks overlaid with a live singer, and thus did away with the necessity of hiring bands either for clubs or for recording purposes. Even as disco swept rock off the airwaves in 1977, it retained many of its previous associations with the gay subculture.

Most notable of the gay-associated disco performers was a group (in itself rare for the genre) of New Yorkers called The Village People, which dressed like a collection of gay stereotypes. With songs like 1978's "Macho Man," "YMCA" (a number two hit in 1979), and "In the Navy," The Village People appealed with little indirection to the gay disco audience, but found themselves becoming a mass commercial success as well. The United States Navy at one point agreed to use "In the Navy" as part of a recruiting campaign, but quickly dropped the idea when it was pointed out to them that the song was full of only thinly disguised homoeroticism. The openly gay black disco singer Sylvester,

based in San Francisco, managed a fairly successful career for some years (he succumbed to AIDS in 1988). Generally, however, the mass commercial success of disco, which lasted into the early eighties, discouraged producers from including frankly homosexual themes in their lyrics.

In reaction to the dominant position of disco in the mid-seventies, there arose in 1975 a new underground movement with inspirations going back to the rock and roll of the fifties: **punk rock**. As an underground, with little hope for substantial airplay, the punks were able and encouraged to break all the taboos they could find, protesting against the "safe" homogeneity of disco lyrics.

Both founders of punk, singer Patti Smith (a bisexual) and the group The Ramones, sang about homosexuality in their debut albums. When the movement reached Britain in 1976, it sparked a similar reaction with groups like the Sex Pistols and the Buzzcocks singing about explicitly homosexual themes; punk ideology opposed homophobia. Rather than frequent the disco-oriented gay bars, homosexual rockers went to punk clubs and made their presence notable in an atmosphere of general acceptance.

Punk began to make an impression on the wider gay audience when gay punk singers began to move out of the genre and into the wider "new wave" musical movement; in this fashion London gay activist Tom Robinson and ex-Buzzcock Pete Shelley became widely known. Robinson's 1978 "Glad to Be Gay" drew wide attention even as a punk song, perhaps the only widely successful song to treat homosexuality as a political issue; the telephone numbers of the New York and Los Angeles gay switchboards were listed on the inner sleeve of his "Power in the Darkness" album. Shelley's "Homosapien" love song became a commercially successful (especially in England) dance song in 1981 despite explicit lyrics. Meanwhile, punk has continued as a thriving, if

"underground," music through the eighties, and it is still notable for producing explicitly homoerotic songs and singers.

The trend towards musical diversification led to women's music sung by lesbians. As early as 1969 Maxine Feldman was proudly singing "Angry At This," which became the first example to be issued as a 45 rpm single. Later, Holly Near, Meg Christian, and Cris Williamson were to become long-term favorites, frequently performing in cabarets and women's festivals. The firm of Olivia Records was created to record and market this music. No one of comparable stature appeared from a purely gay-male context, but in the 1970s gay (and lesbian) choruses sprang up in major cities of North America, spreading to Europe as well.

Early in the 1980s, radio programmers and mass audiences began to tire of disco, opening the way for the popular acceptance of the once-underground "New Wave," which evolved into "electropop" by incorporating synthesizers and other electronic music. In Britain a number of new wave figures such as the androgynous Boy George and the Culture Club and the outright gay groups Bronski Beat, Soft Cell, and Frankie Goes to Hollywood achieved widespread commercial success; Bronski Beat in particular produced a string of popular gay-oriented songs. Towards the end of the decade this tradition was carried on by singers in the bands Erasure and the Pet Shop Boys. The Broadway version of *La Cage aux Folles* showed that even a musical about transvestites could be successful, but it did not start a trend. By and large, explicit gay music retreated from the American mainstream in the 1980s as AIDS put a damper on gay romanticism.

Conclusion. As we have seen, the forces of censorship often operated to keep gay elements in mainstream popular songs on the level of ambiguity and innuendo. Yet this need for covertness bonded with the homosexual talent for camp humor to produce examples that are not only creative but throw light on the consciousness

of gay men and lesbians in earlier as well as recent times. For a brief time in the 1970s it looked as if explicitly gay-related music was successfully breaking into the commercially successful mainstream of popular music. Nevertheless, for examples of explicit treatment of gay/lesbian themes the contemporary listener must often turn to relatively uncommercial sources such as the feminist groups or the punks.

Stephen Donaldson

MUSICIANS

The mythical archetype of the homosexual musician is the figure of the Greek **Orpheus**, noted for his magical art in music and poetry. After the loss of his wife Eurydice, Orpheus gathered together an entourage of young men, whom he wooed with song. In some **inventor legends** he is regarded as the discoverer of pederasty itself. A more humble ancestor is Corydon, the love-sick shepherd of **Vergil's** Second Eclogue, who poured out his unrequited affection for the youth Alexis in song, accompanying himself on the pipes.

Baroque Music. Opera, arising at the start of the seventeenth century in southern Europe where the Counter-Reformation had its baleful sway, nonetheless provided an umbrella for a certain amount of nonconformity. For musical reasons, many of the most important roles were sung by eunuch males, the **castrati**, who sometimes became the objects of male devotion among the rich and cultivated devotees of the art.

For Jean-Baptiste **Lully** (1632–1687), a native of Florence who dominated music-making at the French court of Louis XIV, scholars have been able to piece together a complex picture of the trials and triumphs of a major gay musician. After composing numerous ballets, in 1672 Lully obtained a patent for the production of opera and established the Académie Royale de Musique, which he used to ensure a virtual monopoly of the operatic stage.

Skillfully adapting the conventions of Italian grand opera to French taste, he set the pattern for French opera down to the late eighteenth century. His homosexual conduct generated endless gossip, which he forestalled temporarily by marrying in 1661. In the end he owed his survival to the support of the king, who could not do without the sumptuous entertainments Lully provided.

Pietro Metastasio (1698–1782) was by far the most important librettist of baroque opera. The son of a Roman grocer, Pietro was adopted at the age of eleven by a noble who was undoubtedly in love with him and who provided the classical education needed for his career. His tempestuous later career was marked by dramatic involvements with women as well as with men, including the famous castrato Carlo Broschi (better known as Farinelli; 1705–1782).

George Frederick Handel (1685–1759), born in Germany, but active mainly in Italy and in England, wrote many operas and oratorios. In striking contrast to his great contemporary Johann Sebastian Bach, Handel never married or had children. His associations point to homosexual inclinations, but if he exercised this taste, he covered his tracks so successfully that modern research has not been able to find the evidence.

Romanticism and After. The key figure for musical romanticism was the great Viennese composer **Franz Schubert** (1797–1828), whose unique melodic gift enabled him to reach the heart of every musical task he attempted. In Vienna Schubert moved in bohemian circles, which teemed with homosexual and bisexual lovers of the arts. Schubert never married, rejecting suggestions that he do so with outbursts of temper. His romantic attachments to men appear in veiled form in a short story he wrote in 1822, "My Dream." The composer died of syphilis just after reaching the age of thirty.

The sexual tastes of Schubert's lesser French counterpart, Camille Saint-