

The Newsletter
for the LGBTQ Study Group
of the American Musicological Society

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The LGBTQ Study Group is a recognized special interest group of the American Musicological Society. Its objectives include promoting communication among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual and queer music scholars; increasing awareness of issues in sexuality and music in the academic community; and establishing a forum for the presentation of scholarly work on all aspects of sexuality and music. The group also provides an environment in which to examine processes of transitioning and coming out in academia, to contribute to a positive political climate for the inclusion of LGBTQ perspectives in curricula and to encourage affirmative action and non-discriminatory policies regarding sexuality and gender, as well as age, race, ethnicity and conjugal status.

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Membership dues for the LGBTQ Study Group include subscription to spring and fall issues of The Newsletter. The financial burden of producing The Newsletter is not eased by any institution or grant. Though we welcome contributions in any amount, a Supporting Membership of \$25 goes toward production of The Newsletter. Please see the insert to this issue for further information.

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From the Editor:

Hello All! Many changes have occurred to the Study Group since the last issue of the Newsletter, chief among them the make up of the board. Richard Agee (Secretary-Treasurer), Rose Theresa (Co-Editor of the Newsletter), and Gillian Rodger (Co-chair) leave the board after several years of excellent service. Thank you all for your hard work! Filling these vacated positions are Judith Peraino (Cornell University), who will serve as Co-Chair and Kevin Clifton (Ithaca College), the new Secretary-Treasurer. Welcome!

Finally, the Spring issue of the Newsletter is in its planning stage. If you wish to have material considered (such as essays, book and conference reviews, syllabi, announcements, etc.), please submit them on or before March 1, 2007 to ratorre@wisc.edu.

All best wishes,
Robert

Report from Bill Meredith, Co-Chair (November 6, 2006)

Dear all:

We had a very productive AMS-LGBTQ business meeting and quite stimulating--okay, I can't resist as Judith Halberstam talked about "Lesbians on Ecstasy" (Not to speak of what may have been the best party ever that night...).

The board has decided to try a new organizational strategy for the Newsletter, which I will briefly explain before I call for nominations for the new position.

Over the years several problems have arisen with the newsletter (including, among others, training the new editors, finding material, etc.). To help solve some of these problems and in response to complaints and suggestions from editors, the Board has decided to set up the following "committee" to produce the newsletter:

1. Editor (2 year term). Currently: Robert Torre
2. An assistant editor (2-year term but will lead to the editor position after two years in training). Currently: open
3. Editorial board of 3 members, consisting of immediate past editor and two other members who will agree to assist in locating material and other tasks

I am working on the editorial board positions, but we very much need someone to volunteer to become the assistant editor. If you are interested or if you know of a graduate student who would be interested, please let me know asap.

Thanks,

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“I would like to disappear into those vowels”: Gender-Troubling Opera
by Serena Guarracino

A piercing, penetrating sound: the sexual overtones of this expression are hard to underestimate. If the sound is a human voice, or more, the powerful, ‘phallic’ voice of an opera singer, the relation between two bodies, the voicing body and the body receiving the voice, is easily sexualized: as Wayne Koestenbaum writes, “to hear is metaphorically to be *impregnated* – with thought, tone, and sensation.”¹ And yet, the singing body, the body that ‘penetrates’, is not necessarily a male body, as the role play of compulsory heterosexuality would require; on the contrary, the opera singer, the huge, bodily opera singer is, in Western theaters as well as in the collective imaginary, mainly female – or, at best, a castrated man (in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), or a man with an almost unnaturally high voice, such as for the late twentieth-century tenors. The singer, then, acquires bisexual characteristics in the act of singing as the voice itself, coming from that most feminine of orifices, the mouth, which is also endowed with a ‘phallic’, penetrating energy.²

As a consequence, the listener’s body can become a contested space where diverse discourses about gender identity emerge. Koestenbaum, allowing his biologically male body to be impregnated by the voice of the opera singer, performs a disturbing reversal of gender roles, attributing to his own body the peculiarly female power to become pregnant. Thus the critic’s body is consciously self-constructed as beyond the categories of gender as well as beyond the homo-heterosexual divide. The critic’s power of generation, as this essay will show, finds its expression in writing, where both ‘academic’ and ‘creative’ texts result from this “acrobatic couplings of music and words.”³

Yet, at the same time opera enforces compulsory heterosexuality through operatic plots and the science of the voice. The normative stance of

opera toward gender and sexuality has encountered scrutiny in recent years, since well-known feminist Catherine Clément, in her *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, first conceptualized the dangerous relations between opera and gender politics.⁴ The English translation of the book in 1989 and the publication of subsequent studies that hybridize traditional musicology with gender and cultural studies were followed by a strong debate within the musical academy.⁵ For these self-defined “new musicologists”, from Koestenbaum to Terry Castle and Elizabeth Wood, opera is the medium through which a voice of dissonance acts against the systems of both compulsory heterosexuality and the musical academy can be expressed by the music critic in the act of writing.⁶ As a consequence, writing about opera becomes a gesture of resistance deeply associated with the quest for a voice by scholars whose sexual identity does not fall into the male/female categories imposed by the heterosexual matrix.

This involvement of opera with gender construction and deconstruction has also inspired a heterogeneous group of writers, especially women writers, who have found in the voice of opera a vehicle to express their own voices. The criticism and publishing of these works marks one of the *loci* for new musicology to operate in a peculiar hyper-genred and hyper-gendered fashion, articulating a desire that makes a proud show of its willing inability to mark its object and forms in terms of the male/female binary, and even of the homo/heterosexual one. The point of these writings is not to ‘give voice’ to female vs. male, or to homosexual vs. heterosexual desire, but to dissolve the boundaries between genders and bodies, to the point of attaining a joyous, playful (con)fusion of bodies and desires, exemplified by the closure of Hélène Cixous’ “Tancredi Continues”, or the merging into sonorous vowels enacted by Sujata Bhatt’s “*Ars Poetica*”.

The Scholar's Voice

The starting point of new musicology's attention to gender studies has actually come from 'classical feminism', an unlikely environment for the development of an interest in bisexuality, both as social practice and as theoretical tool. Claire Hemmings has recently noted how the heavy investment of the early feminist movement on sexual difference, considered as "women's difference from men, and women's sameness in relation to each other", made difficult even a tentative work on bisexual theory and practices.⁷ Bisexuality was the monstrous discourse of 'other': apolitical at best, at worst showing dangerous residues of patriarchal submission.⁸

And yet, this 'essentialist' version of feminism is at the roots of Clément's book, which has nonetheless proved seminal to the development of a new awareness for gender politics in classical music, introducing feminist critique to patriarchal narrative structures in musical analysis. Her stance has been widely appropriated, first by Susan McClary, who in her first monograph on the subject, *Feminine Endings*, uses opera in part to situate her own position against the musical academy. Here, her identification with the downtrodden wife from *Bluebeard's Castle* by Bela Bartók mirrors Clément's sisterhood with opera heroines and their attempt to transgress patriarchal norms. Thus, in the face of musicology's prohibition to explore what music means in terms of social and cultural constructions, McClary dons the mask of Bluebeard's wife Judith:

Like Judith, I have been granted access by my mentors to an astonishing cultural legacy: musical repertoires from all of history and the entire globe, repertoires of extraordinary beauty, power, and formal sophistication. It might be argued that I ought to be grateful, since there has really been one stipulation in the bargain – namely, that I never ask what any of it means.⁹

This style, with its merging of the personal, the academic, and the political, was to become typical of new musicology. Operatic

characters (both living and fictional) become *alter egos* through which the troubled scholar can find a voice; and the model can be found in Clément's book, where she expresses the osmosis between herself and opera's characters as follows:

I will have to slowly incorporate, without anyone's knowing, these dangerous objects, these women who fought so well, these sorceresses who from now on are part of my life. And at the same time that their music is inscribed in obsessive melodies, the ferment of swelling rebellion passes from them to me. I am pregnant with them.¹⁰

Clément's 'classical' feminist approach to her subject matter naturally picks up women characters as her principal interlocutors, although she spares a whole chapter of her book for "Madmen, Negroes, Jesters", "betrayed, wounded men" who "die like heroines", and who "partake of femininity".¹¹ Thus, for her femininity is not a biological entity, but rather the name for a constructed position of marginality against the Western patriarchal/heterosexual norm. As a consequence, her heterodox use of the pregnancy metaphor, encountered earlier in Koestenbaum's quotation, gives the measure of how the rhetoric and politics of gender studies in new musicology is not necessarily an essentialist refusal as much as a manipulation of the heterosexual matrix, remindful of the power of rupture embodied in drag as defined by Judith Butler: "in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency."¹²

Bisexuality, in these terms, assumes the characteristics of more than one gender identity, that perhaps happen concurrent or in separate moments, melting the boundaries between 'female' and 'male', and endlessly shaping and re-shaping the socialized writing body of the critic. Here then, the pregnancy metaphor loses its biological determination to express a reciprocity, a generative movement of the voice from one body to another that perverts the way gender roles are supposed to shape identity. For Koestenbaum too, the act of listening as well as that of voicing marks the place of identity, expressed again

through a deeply sexualized imagery: “a singer doesn’t expose her own throat, she exposes the listener’s interior. Her voice enters me, makes me a ‘me’, an interior, by virtue of the fact that I have been entered.”¹³ The singer, who more often than not in Koestenbaum’s terms, assumes the hyper-feminine persona of the *diva*, is nonetheless posed as both penetrating entity, thus partaking of a renowned ‘male’ peculiarity, and object of desire – by a self-defined homosexual man, who should not supposedly be interested in women’s bodies.

Koestenbaum’s writing makes clear that even the category of homosexuality can be proved limiting in the articulation of desire through the medium of opera, where the craving for the *diva* is expressed and acknowledged by the opera lover (either male or female, straight or gay) as part and parcel of his own grammar of desire. In these terms, new musicology’s approach to opera opens up to the new attitude toward bisexuality brought about by queer studies, where, as Hemmings writes, a new interest is shown in “fragmentation and difference within lesbian and gay communities [...] interwoven with a feminist progression of ideas about what constitutes identity”.¹⁴ The performativity of sexual identity marks the place of bisexuality in this landscape, as already envisioned by Clément’s fellow feminist, Hélène Cixous, who in their book *The Newly-Born Woman* thus describes this “other” bisexuality:

To this bisexuality that melts together and effaces, wishing to avert castration, I oppose the *other bisexuality*, the one with which every subject, who is not shut up inside the spurious Phallogocentric Performing Theater, sets up his or her erotic universe. Bisexuality – that is to say the location within oneself of the presence of both sexes, evident and insistent in different ways according to the individual, the nonexclusion of difference or of a sex [...], the multiplication of the effects of desire’s inscription on every part of the body and the other body.¹⁵

We will see, in the second part of this essay, how Cixous’ alternative ‘performing theatre’ takes the form of an opera theater. Meanwhile,

it is worth noting that this nonexclusive interplay between genders and desires finds a voice in new musicology through the already explored response between voice and ear, singer and listener, that from McClary and Koestenbaum, seeps into the “homovocality” Terry Castle finds in the voice of mezzo-soprano Brigitte Fassbaender, as well as into Elizabeth Wood’s “sapphonic”: “I intend to use [sapphonic] as a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of lesbian possibility, for a range of erotic and emotional relationships among women who sing and women who listen.”¹⁶ This writing enacts a perversion of the system of compulsory heterosexuality that can offer a different landscape of imagination and expression, where *every* kind of sexuality becomes a performative act of resistance against a system that offers no words to express them.

Koestenbaum is explicit in dealing with this difficulty while writing *The Queen’s Throat*:

in my monograph I speak about music’s origins in physiological patterns of tension and release; I don’t mention sex, but sex is there between the lines, waiting to be rescued by the right readers. And yet I lack the language to say all this effectively; I lack conceptual tools.¹⁷

An alternative to the language of the system and academy is offered to the opera fan by the voices of Fassbaender or Maria Callas, who put into question the very system that created them, the very system that endlessly tries to curb them. The position at the margins of the Western episteme--that most new musicologists willingly and proudly advocate for themselves--is a political choice that wishes to undermine academic, artistic, social and symbolic structures. This is the meaning implied in the title of one of the most significant miscellanies on the subject, *Queering the Pitch*, where ‘to queer the pitch’, as Koestenbaum writes in his introduction, means “to interfere with, to spoil the business (of a tradesman or showman).”¹⁸ Following these starting points, gender studies in the music field operate in a radically deconstructive attitude: where McClary identifies herself with Bluebeard’s treacherous wife, Koestenbaum is Bertha Rochester: “I dreamt that the music depart-

ment caught fire; outside it, I cavorted like Bertha Rochester in sultry, vindicated, mystic dance. In the dream, no scores burned, and the police, when they arrived, applauded.”¹⁹

The voice relating this ‘dream’ in Koestenbaum’s introduction is not identified with the narrator but with a “lesbian friend”, to whose frustration in working in a hostile academic environment the main narrator pretends to give voice. In another episode of the same text, again in a ‘direct speech’ first person, another lesbian scholar expresses her feeling of estrangement through another *diva*, *Bessie Smith*:

I could see standards in the smile of the lovely young straight woman, a scholarly star who teaches the Schonberg seminar. She told me (in rarefied diction I dare not imitate) that music was independent of the body. In response, I wanted to strip her naked and lick her body head to toe while humming Bessie Smith’s ‘I’ve Been Mistreated and I Don’t Like It’.²⁰

These are only two examples from the apparently random sequence of quotations, patches of dialogues Koestenbaum spins in his introduction, where his interlocutors are alternatively and vaguely identified as diverse (and anonymous) colleagues, male and female, hetero- and (more or less openly) homosexual. The potentiality for opposition between male vs. female scholars, as well as between queer vs. straight (and open vs. closet queer) melts into the uninterrupted flux of words that condensate in a few pages a diverse and purposefully uncategorized ensemble of experiences involving music, sexuality, and the academy. The result of this writing practice is a rupture with academic writing as such, performing a trans-textuality at the limit between critical writing, (auto)biography, and fiction; it also puts into place a choral voice that is able to embody the attempt of this miscellany to identify a specific school of thought inside the academic world.

Koestenbaum’s style has actually become a distinctive mark of musical queer theory, with its accent posed on sexual practices as a form of resistance and on the almost autobiographical meaning of one’s own academic work. Thus Re-

becca Pope and Susan Leonardi feel the need to open their book *The Diva’s Mouth* with a self-portrait revealing how deep is the investment of the writers in their topic of research for the definition of their social identity:

We are political animals; living in the D.C. area, of course, exacerbates existing tendencies. Hopeless left-wing flailers, utopianists (more you than me, Rebecca groans), revolutionaries, cynics, thoroughly compromised middle-class hedonists [...], we live out the very contradictions and hypocrisies we try to expose in our work. We politicize everything, even, our students say – angry, irritated, disgusted – sex and art.²¹

Opera and musicology thus become a perverse way of being ‘political’, or a political perversity: for Koestenbaum “all varieties of operatic voices are perverse”, even those that are strictly educated according to the classical tradition.²²

The Acrobatic Couplings of Musicology and Literature

As it has already emerged in the first part of this essay, new musicology follows the methodology of cultural studies, in that it does not limit its attention to ‘music’ as a cultural product. On the contrary, in their effort to explore the impact of musical production in the social sphere, and vice versa, many new musicologists have turned to literature as a medium that could express the import of operatic imaginary on a wider public. This operation, of course, does not follow the canonical pathways of literary criticism; as a consequence, what is generally considered a minor work, like George Eliot’s poem “Armgarth”, may in this context acquire a new relevance, as it is one of the first literary works to use the character of an opera diva as proxy for the voice of the writer.²³

The poem narrates the troubled parable of Armgarth, a female singer who becomes famous for impersonating a male character (Orpheus in Gluck’s opera) and who refuses marriage with Graf Dornberg to retire, after losing her voice, in Freiburg with her cousin Fräulein Walpurga, thus

creating a sort of proto-sapphic household that may be found in other works that have come under the scrutiny of new musicologists: thus Susan Leonard puts it together with Willa Cather's *The Song of the Lark* (1915) and Marcia Davenport's *Of Lena Geyer* (1936), where, as Leonard writes, "this voice and this life empower other women, free them from the necessity of marriage, and give them voice, in Armgart's words, for channel to their souls."²⁴ This empowerment, travelling from woman to woman through the powerful voice of the diva, is also the main theme of Elizabeth Wood's 'sapphonic', that joins Davenport's and Cather's novels with Kate O'Brien's *As Music and Splendour* (1958), in which the relationship between the two main characters, Clare and Luisa, assume more explicit lesbian overtones.

In the same terms Terry Castle writes about the "long tradition of 'Sapphic' diva-worship in the world of opera: a history of female-to-female 'fan' attachment as intense, fantastical, and sentimental as any ever enacted on the fabled isle of Lesbos."²⁵ Castle's essay is in itself a 'coming out', both as devoted fan of Brigitte Fassbaender and as a lesbian scholar, "for what can be more undignified than confessing one's susceptibility to a thrilling female voice?"²⁶ Castle, as Wood, directly associated opera diva fandom with the voicing of a desire outside the heterosexual matrix:

indeed, one could almost speak of diva-worship as an "objective correlative" of female homoeroticism in the nineteenth and early twentieth century – so obviously and so often, especially among women of a certain class and educational background, were its rhapsodies and exaltation the token of a deeper emotional and physical yearning after the feminine.²⁷

Yet, the point of these critical readings is not necessarily to see the diva as a topos for lesbian literature, although this may also be the case; the intimacy between the singer and the listener/writer, as it has already appeared in Koestenbaum's writing, cannot be reduced to the performance of the heterosexual binary even in its 'different' forms, as the butch-femme couple of publicly acknowledged representations of lesbian love. Fall 2006

On the contrary, Wood refers to what Adrienne Rich calls 'lesbian continuum' as the founding moment of her research: "Like the writers who read Sappho of Lesbos as poetic precursor of modern lesbian identity, my act of naming claims Sappho the singer for a 'lesbian continuum' of listening that itself engendered Sapphonic performances and Sapphonic operas."²⁸ The desire for the diva is both emotional and physical; it is also the desire to *have* and to *be* the *primadonna*, in a merging of bodies and voices (the operatic and the literary) that finds a powerful incarnation in the writings of Hélène Cixous.

Forestalling many outcomes of new musicology, her poetic essay (for want of a better name) "Tancredi continue", written in 1983 but published in English only in 1995, finds in Rossini's *Tancredi* a voice for a desperate appeal across gender binaries.²⁹ The problem, for Cixous, is to overcome the boundaries imposed by a language articulated in the binary pattern of the 'masculine' and the 'feminine':

I know that if I say 'woman' or 'man' one more time – and quite simply (as I have done, as we do, as we have all done, which is why I do it too) – I won't be able to shake the words off either myself or her (and we will end up no longer loving those whom we love, and we will deceive ourselves until we no longer love).³⁰

The embodiment of this rupture against language becomes Rossini's hero, Tancredi, a role originally for a *castrato*, but today performed by mezzo-sopranos and countertenors.³¹ The voice of the female singer performing the male hero, whose heroic virility sharply contrasts with later 'en travestie' characters like Mozart's adolescent Cherubino, asks a question for which Cixous, as Koestenbaum, finds no words for an answer: "So it is a question of the mystery of *woman* and *man*. Are these words the proper names of two mysteries or of one?"³² This bisexual mystery recoils from giving any gendered name to desire; and, as such, strikes at the core of the heterosexual matrix, and at any attempt at domesticating the idea of bisexuality itself through its positioning half-way between homo- and heterosexuality.

On the contrary, bisexuality in this context marks the place of a rhetoric of desire not limited by the binary dynamics of gender, for which music can offer a language: “Help, Mozart, Rossini, help, number without gender, gender without limit!”³³ To this call, Tancredi and *Tancredi* offers a plurality of voices, voices that could be defined as feminine if they did not defy any such categorization. For Cixous, to state that Tancredi the hero, testosterone-laden Tancredi may participate in a feminine nuance, embodied by the woman’s voice of the opera singer, means to trigger the (con)fusion this kind of voices bring to the gender paradigm. The role of Tancredi requires from the singer the use of the lower octave, what Emma Calvé called ‘voix de poltrine’ and that “could produce a powerful ‘masculine’ sound”.³⁴ Maria Callas was notorious for her use of this register, as Koestenbaum notes: “We admire Callas for exceeding and giving the lie to modern measurements. No note she sings remains the same; she changes voice *inside* the note, as if to say: “Try to catch me, to name me, to confine me in your brutalizing classifications!”³⁵

Where Terry Castle has Brigitte Fassbaender, and Koestenbaum Callas (and many others), Cixous places Marilyn Horne and Joan Sutherland, whose voices, similar and yet dissimilar, embody the similarity-in-difference that goes beyond the numeric abstractions of the ‘one’ or the ‘two’: “I can hear two voices, one is a woman’s and the other one is a woman’s too, rushing headlong toward each other, one of them is not a woman, one of them is not only a woman, *the one is not simply the opposite of the other.*”³⁶ In an attempt to embody the multiplicity of voices opera offers to the listener/writer’s eager ear, the sing-song rhythm of Cixous’ poetic prose (that sometimes acquires the conventional graphic layout of free verse) probes the borderlines of language, and of the economy of love inscribed in it. In this aural landscape of multiple desires, the ‘I’ of the piece cannot but find herself entangled in the complexity of a love that is not directed toward any One: “I was in love with one with the other. With both of them. Because of the other I loved. One because of the other. One for and against the other.”³⁷

Cixous’ text thus enacts a resonance-in-difference associating opera with what in “Sorties” she defines as *écriture féminine*, a writing that tries to reduce as much as possible the difference between voice and writing, presence and absence.³⁸ If on one hand it is impossible, and even not advisable, to fill this gap, the resulting liminal space (traditionally the locus of ‘bisexuality’) may become haunted with the expression of a desire for a body that is neither asexual nor univocally sexualized, but that locates itself in the multiple, mobile *locus of operatic performance*:

I would like to be Fredrika Brillembourg
when she becomes Orpheus
in the Berlioz version of Gluck’s opera.³⁹

This desire is expressed by Indo-English poet Sujata Bhatt in her poem “*Ars Poetic*”^a. Starting from the dialogue between the narrator, the ‘I’ that desires to be Brillembourg, and an anonymous ‘you’, both notably without gender specification, the poem drifts into a quest for a voice beyond the word of the poet or writer, a quest reaching out for the voice as the ‘moving’ element – an affecting voice, but also a voice in movement between the boundaries of gender identity:

It is not necessarily the writer
that I envy but the poem –
And it’s not simply the poem but the cadence
That *moves* me.
And to be honest
I should add it’s not
only the cadence
that *affects* me but also
the way certain lines can be sung
by certain singers –
certain singers with certain
types of voices.
(my italics)

The technical specification of “certain singers with certain types of voices” recalls the Fassbaenders, Hornes, Sutherlands and Callases of operatic history, who have already proved objects of desire by the listener/writer, desire of and for a voice powerful enough to signify, in its endless

movement among genders, places, languages and cultures. In this voice desire becomes flesh, as the singer's body is shaped and caressed by the musical-poetic word:

I would like to be the song
that accompanies her as she strides
across the stage in her black suit –
the jacket now flapping open,
now flapping against
her body like a huge wounded wing.

This desire, as in Cixous, as in Koestenbaum and Wood, results in a merging of voices, the voice of the critic and poet resonating with the singing of the opera diva, and the diva's voice emerging silently from the pages of the listener/writer. The repeated 'yes' closing the poem opens to this new and renewed bisexuality of voices giving life and voice to a plural, permeable identity:

Envy? Oh yes.

Oh, yes,

I would like to disappear
into those vowels –

Notes

Serena Guarracino recently finished her PhD in "Literatures, Cultures, and Histories of Anglophone Countries" at the University of Naples "L'Orientale," with a dissertation entitled "Having Voice. Opera Migration in English-speaking Cultures." Her research interests range from gender, postcolonial, and cultural studies to classical music and new musicology. She has published in Italian on Edward Said and music, and on the role of female singers in 19th and 20th century women's writing; in English on J.M. Coetzee, music in Shakespeare's romances, the relations between music and postcolonial theory, and more recently on national narratives in the English early music revival. She currently teaches English through a cultural studies approach. Her translation of "Sycorax", by Indo-English writer Suniti Namjoshi, is forthcoming.

¹ Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat. Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* (London: Penguin, 1994), 16.

² For the parallels between the mouth and the vagina, especially in the case of the toothed vagina, see Jon Stratton, *The Desirable Body: Cultural Fetishism and the Erotics of Consumption* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 147; for the 'phallic' voice see especially Roland

Barthes, *S/Z* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

³ As opera itself is, according to this definition by Michel Poizat; see *The Angel's Cry. Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera*, trans. Arthur Denner (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), ix.

⁴ Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing (London: Virago, 1989).

⁵ See, among many others: Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings. Music, Gender and Sexuality* (Oxford, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the 19th Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991); Ruth A. Solie, ed. *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Corinne E. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith, eds. *En Travesti. Women, Gender Subversion, Opera* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas, eds. *Queering the Pitch. The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994); Susan J. Leonard and Rebecca A. Pope, *The Diva's Mouth: Body, Voice, Prima Donna Politics* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1996); Richard Dellamora and Daniel Fischlin, eds. *The Work of Opera. Genre, Nationhood, and Sexual Difference* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); and Mary Ann Smart, ed. *Siren Songs. Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁶ The definition was first appropriated by the musicologists participating in the miscellany *Queering the Pitch*, whose editors in their foreword write that "the academic priesthood, in unusual alliance with mainstream music critics, has already reacted with alarm to the work of the more progressive practitioners of the "new" musicology (which our title [*Queering the Pitch. The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*] both salutes and gaily usurps)." Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas, foreword to *Queering the Pitch*, vii.

⁷ Clare Hemmings, "Locating Bisexual Identities: Discourses of Bisexuality and Contemporary Feminist Theory," in *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities*, eds. David Bell and Gill Valentine (London: Routledge, 1995), 42.

⁸ See Hemmings, "Locating Bisexual Identities," 47.

⁹ McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 4.

¹⁰ Clément, *Opera*, 175.

¹¹ Clément, *Opera*, 119.

¹² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 175.

¹³ Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat*, 42.

¹⁴ Hemmings, "Locating Bisexual Identities," 48.

¹⁵ Hélène Cixous, "Sorties," in Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing, foreword by Sandra Gilbert (London: I.B Tauris, [1975] 1986), 84

(italics in the text).

¹⁶ Elizabeth Wood, "Sapphonics," in *Queering the Pitch*, 27; and Terry Castle, "In Praise of Brigitte Fassbaender (A Musical Emanation)," in *The Apparitional Lesbian. Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (N.Y.: Columbia U.P., 1993), 200-230; reprinted in *En Travesti*, 1-58.

¹⁷ Koestenbaum, "Queering the Pitch: a Posy of Definition and Impersonation," in *Queering the Pitch*, 2 (my italics).

¹⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, quot. in Koestenbaum, "Queering the Pitch," 1.

¹⁹ Koestenbaum, "Queering the Pitch," 1-2. For feminist readings of Bertha Rochester see Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), 347-362. A postcolonial approach to *Jane Eyre* can be found in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," in *The Feminist Reader. Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, eds. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), especially 181-186.

²⁰ Koestenbaum, "Queering the Pitch," 3.

²¹ Leonardi and Pope, *The Diva's Mouth*, 8.

²² Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat*, 169.

²³ See George Eliot, "Armgarth," in *The Spanish Gipsy, the Legend of Jubal, and Other Poems, Old and New* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, [1871] 1901), 328-374.

²⁴ Susan J. Leonardi, "To Have a Voice: The Politics of the Diva," in *Perspectives on Contemporary Literature* 13. (1987), 71. For the *primadonna* as proto-feminist *exemplum* both in fiction and in real life see Susan Rutherford, "The Voice of Freedom: Images of the Primadonna," in *The New Woman and Her Sisters. Feminism and Theatre 1850-1914*, eds. Viv Gardner and Susan Rutherford (NY. and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 95-113.

²⁵ Castle, "In Praise of Brigitte Fassbaender," 202.

²⁶ Castle, "In Praise of Brigitte Fassbaender," 200.

²⁷ Castle, "In Praise of Brigitte Fassbaender," 207-208.

²⁸ Wood, "Sapphonics," 27. Rich defines the 'lesbian continuum' as follows: "I mean the term *lesbian continuum* to include a range – through each woman's life and throughout history – of woman-identified experience; not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman. If we expand it to embrace many more forms of primary intensity between and among women [...] we begin to grasp breadths of female history and psychology which have lain out of reach as a consequence of limited, mostly clinical, definitions of 'lesbianism.'" Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5:4 (summer 1985), 658.

²⁹ Hélène Cixous, "Tancredi continue" (1983); English trans. "Tancredi continues," in *En Travesti*, 152-168.

³⁰ Cixous, "Tancredi Continues," 155.

³¹ In recent times these roles have also been performed by countertenors, men whose high voice range (higher than tenors and most times overlapping the aural realm of women) poses another, different challenge to the male/female voice divide: see my "Voicing the Archive. Sexual/National Politics in Early Music," *Politics of Archive and the Aesthetics of Memory*, special issue of *Anglistica* 8:1/2 (2004), 185-201.

³² Cixous, "Tancredi Continues," 155 (italics in the text).

³³ Cixous, "Tancredi Continues," 164.

³⁴ Wood, "Sapphonics," 30.

³⁵ Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat*, 146. Callas, whose career precedes the early music revival and the subsequent rebirth of former *castrato* roles, has notably crossed the gender boundary in the opposite direction, lending a peculiarly masculine tone to characters like Verdi's Lady Macbeth or Bizet's Carmen.

³⁶ Cixous, "Tancredi Continues," 167 (my italics).

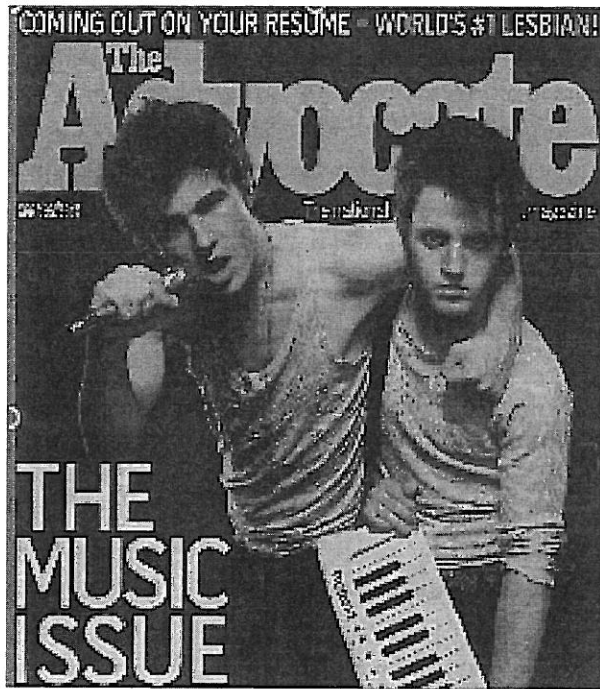
³⁷ Cixous, "Tancredi Continues," 163

³⁸ See Cixous, "Sorties," especially 170. For the concept of the difference, or *différance*, in writing, see the work of Jacques Derrida, esp. *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

³⁹ Sujata Bhatt, "Ars Poetica," in *Angatora* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2000), 106.

Mimicking the Supersexual: A Search for Efficacy in the Performance of Ambiguous Sexualities
by Allison McGuffie

The cover of the April 25, 2006 issue of *The Advocate* announces the following: “THE MUSIC ISSUE / Hot Queer Beats / The duo Dangerous Muse leads a new wave of out musicians on the brink of stardom.”¹



The cover story spread presents images, reviews and interviews with musical groups and individuals introduced variously as “Out singer and songwriter,” “after his, ahem, ‘coming out,’” “a brainy exile in brawny beautiful gay guyville,” “a mostly gay trio,” “avant-garde queer babies who like their music as dark as their eyeliner,” “queer talent,” and the most inventive, “supersexual.”²

A closer examination, however, reveals that the issue’s subtitle proclaiming “a new wave of out musicians” is not entirely accurate, or at least may be misleading, especially considering a quote from the lead story, in which Dangerous Muse’s Mike Furey states, “There’s no such thing as ‘out’ anymore.” Likewise, the use of the deceptively common terms “out” and “queer” on the cover, as well as the new

and creative phrases “mostly gay” and “supersexual” used within the issue as opposed to the more specific and common identity descriptors, such as “gay” or “lesbian” suggests there is something different at work in this issue than the usual musician’s “coming out” story. This is highlighted particularly on the cover of this issue of *The Advocate*, whose tagline “The national gay and lesbian newsmagazine,” is notably disrupted by the image of “supersexual” Dangerous Muse.

In the course of the following argument, I will further examine these seemingly minor signs of ambiguity. Through this analysis I seek to locate the potential for cultural or political efficacy in the performance of ambiguous sexualities. I use the term “ambiguous” to include the multitude of ways that individuals or groups who exhibit non-normative sexualities may be described or describe themselves; many use “bisexual,” but others push beyond conventional terms, broadening the possibilities even further. Significantly, the canon for this inquiry is not based on an individual’s identity claims, but moves beyond such constraints to include any performance that demonstrates sexual ambiguity, regardless of the motivation behind that performance. The diverse range of selections, beginning with musicians in *The Advocate’s* Music Issue, but also including more well-known artists such as Billie Joe Armstrong and Britney Spears, as well as the fictional representation of glam rock performance in the film *Velvet Goldmine*, highlights my intention to push well beyond the realm of identity or representational politics, focusing instead on the constitutive nature of representation.³

This broad focus denies a critique based on the (in)authenticity of the following performances, the type of critique which triggered this inquiry. In a generous move, I translate the call for authenticity to mean a desire for (and

fear of losing) a base for political action and mobilization.⁴ Consequently, while this study focuses specifically on non-normative sexuality in relation to musicians, the argument for resistance and social efficacy based on performance, not authenticity, provides a potential model for other ambiguous social categories, as it frees the struggle for hegemonic change from the often immobilizing effects of debates on authenticity. Additionally, this inquiry focuses on the positive potential in hegemonic processes arising from the small, often individual performances of resistance, power and possible social change.⁵

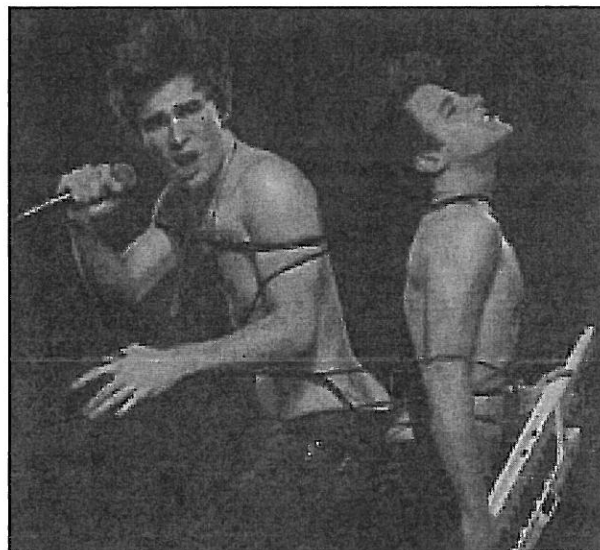
This argument is grounded in critical cultural and queer theories. Stuart Hall's work on Gramsci, hegemony and representation provides a useful understanding of the process of articulation and the creation of hegemonic blocs, as well as the constitutive nature of representation.⁶ Judith Butler's understanding of performativity and queer critique is likewise fundamental to this inquiry.⁷ Through Butler and the work of other queer theorists, I employ a working definition of queer theory: Queer theory is one which offers a critique of norms as they are articulated to sexuality; assumes no causal relationship between sex, gender and sexuality; recognizes the regulatory power inherent in the fiction of sex, gender and sexuality coherence; resists any assumption of a preexisting subject from which subjectivity arises; and constantly struggles to maintain its own fluidity. These concepts flow through the following analyses, hinting at the possibility of hegemonic articulation, and illuminating the power of queer critique.

Therefore, I ultimately demonstrate how the performance of ambiguous sexuality potentially agitates hegemonies through articulation to a queer bloc, as well as through a queer critique, thereby affecting the potential for personal, political, social or cultural change. To explore the potential for resistance and hegemonic change through performance, I will begin with close analysis of several musicians' verbal and visual rhetoric, detailing how ambiguous sexuality is evident in their performances. I

will then identify examples of resistance within those performances, as well as in the mimicry of those performances.

To begin to tease out the discursive resistance present in certain musical performances, I will first identify and provide a brief analysis of some verbal and visual signifiers of ambiguous sexualities. Notably, the following analyses do not dwell on sex or gender ambiguity. The intersections of sexed or gendered performance with the performance of sexual desire are important, but too often assumed to be interchangeable. Rather, I call attention to the arbitrary nature of the relationship between sex, gender and sexuality,⁸ and assert my focus to be on the likewise contingent, but often recognizable verbal and visual signs of sexuality. Therefore, I seek to enunciate the suggestive and explicit rhetorics of the performance of ambiguous sexual desire.

The first examples demonstrate instances of an ambiguous sexuality as recognized through an overtly verbal performance, such as musicians refusing to identify their sexualities with any of the common available terms, or similarly, by identifying their sexualities with a descriptor unrecognizable by the hegemonic blocs that regulate sexuality. Dangerous Muse, a new "electronic dance-pop duo" comprised of Mike Furey and Tom Napack, provides an interesting example of the latter.



Adam Vary of *The Advocate* explains that when asked, Furey and Napack “avoid placing a definitive flag anywhere on the Kinsey scale of sexuality.” Instead, they identify themselves as “supersexual.” Furey goes on to explain, “I don’t think it fits in Kinsey’s chart. It’s multidimensional.” They attribute this definition of sexuality to the New York City nightlife in which they take part, referred to as both “pansexual” and a “nouveau sexual revolution” at different moments in the interview.⁹

Aside from their act of self-identifying as “supersexual,” other verbal rhetoric used by Dangerous Muse to discuss sexuality is loaded with the power to make all sexualities ambiguous. The duo goes on to theorize about sexuality:

Napack: I think in this day and age, especially in the New York nightlife that we’re part of, sexuality isn’t a label anymore. Everyone goes out, and you don’t think of people as gay or straight or bi. Everyone’s there, and a bunch of things happen. No one thinks twice about it.

Furey: There’s no such thing as ‘out’ anymore. It’s like, everybody’s out.¹⁰

While their theories, bent on eliminating identity labels, may come from a scene exclusive to New York, the rhetoric is not entirely unknown in other spheres, and becomes increasingly recognizable as it is distributed through their music – Dangerous Muse’s first single became a dance hit predominantly through online distribution¹¹ – and now through every copy of *The Advocate*’s Music Issue that makes its way into the hands of the largest “gay and lesbian” news audience.

The more popularly known Billie Joe Armstrong of Green Day offers another example. While not as verbally overt as Dangerous Muse, Armstrong’s performance is evident particularly because of his celebrity status. In 1995, Armstrong ‘came out’ as bisexual in the usual ‘coming out’ interview with *The Advocate*.¹² In this case, the identity asserted is a generally recognized, albeit marginalized, sexuality in the eyes of the cultural and political hegemony. But

while Armstrong identifies with this largely accepted term, his personal performance continues to subvert gender and sexuality norms. He defies the most common and naïve assumptions about bisexuality, such as the stereotypes that bisexuality is merely a stage along the progression to true hetero- or homosexuality, or that a bisexual person is unable to commit and is pathologically promiscuous. Armstrong’s successful opposite-sex marriage, as well as his continued identification with queer causes through his music – Green Day’s most recent album earned Armstrong another interview with *The Advocate* and the tagline identifying him as “a queer-friendly punk”¹³ – function as a resistance to the constraints of the very identity label under which he ‘came out.’

Furthermore, the highly-stylized visual appearance of Armstrong and the other Green Day band members demonstrates a resistance to dominant modes of sexuality and gender expression. For example, their public presentation often pairs eyeliner with ‘hip’ masculine suits. The grunge-punk manifestation of men wearing eyeliner with otherwise tailored masculine dress can potentially be understood as a metonymy for not only the obvious gender-bending, but increasingly for obscuring norms of sexual desire. In these subtle ways Armstrong publicly performs his bisexuality.

Another type of verbal performance that displays ambiguity can be seen in and around song lyrics. The discourse around lyrics from the Scottish band Franz Ferdinand provides an interesting example. One track in particular has generated a lot of discussion, even getting the band a spot in *The Advocate*. The song “Michael” was apparently written after lead singer Alex Kapranos watched two male friends “hook up” on the dance floor of a nightclub.¹⁴ But regardless of the motivation, the lyrics, sung to raw, angular, guitar-heavy, danceable music are overtly celebratory of same-sex desire:

This is where I’ll be, so heavenly
/ So come and dance with me Michael
/ So sexy, I’m sexy / So come
and dance with me Michael

... Michael, you're the boy with all
the leather hips / Sticky hair, sticky
hips, stubble on my sticky lips /
Michael, you're the only one I'd
ever want...

Beautiful boys on a beautiful dance-
floor / Michael, you're dancing like
a beautiful dance whore / Michael
waiting on a silver platter now /
And nothing matters now

This is what I am, I am a man /
So come and dance with me Mi-
chael / So strong now, it's strong
now / So come and dance with
me Michael¹⁵

It is not only Franz Ferdinand's lyrics, however, which provide useful material for examining verbal manifestations of ambiguous sexuality. Kapranos provides plenty of further insinuations, as well. In his interview with *The Advocate*, Kapranos offered an ambiguous, witty statement on the band's sexuality: "I don't think anyone in the band is exclusively gay, but I haven't asked in a while."¹⁶ Paired with the lyrics to "Michael," Kapranos' statement is sexually suggestive in an excitingly ambiguous manner. In addition to highlighting the contingent and changeable nature of sexuality, the playful rhetoric in these examples provides further recognizable signs of the verbal performance of ambiguous sexuality.

The last example I look to for addressing what is recognizable about ambiguous sexualities is predominantly expressed through visual rhetoric: Britney Spear's 2003 music video "Me Against the Music" with Madonna. In this video, both Spears and Madonna are dressed in pants suits – Spears with a tie and dominatrix-like accessories – searching for each other through the spaces of a crowded dance club, including a dirty room ornamented with only a dismantled iron bed frame. As the video progresses, so too does their performance of mutual sexual attraction. The video concludes

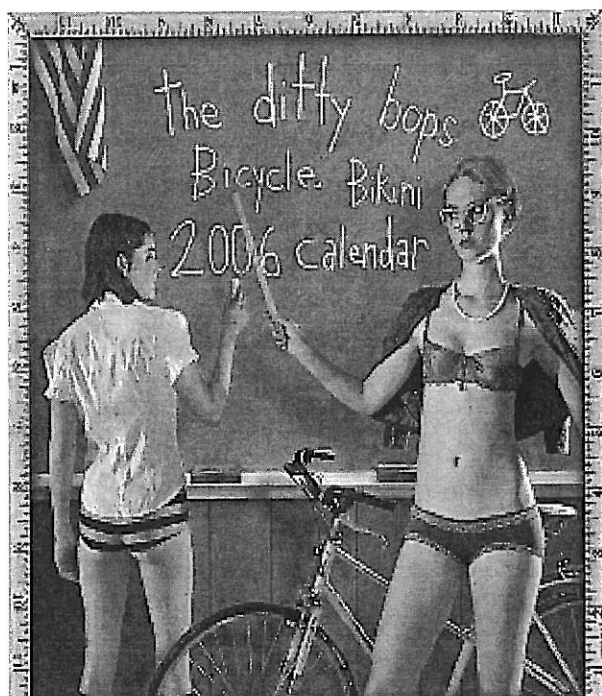
with Spears pinning Madonna to a bare, gritty wall, leaning in for a kiss. Madonna's image disappears before the desire is consummated.

While the "Me Against the Music" video is clearly part of a larger marketing strategy, including the much-publicized "Britney-Madonna Kiss" at the 2003 MTV Music Awards, these commercial, music-based performances also serve to further the proliferation of public images of same-sex, bisexual, or simply ambiguous sexualities, reaching an even larger audience via MTV and VH1 than many of the other examples addressed in this inquiry. This video confuses any assumed boundaries between distinct sexualities. The masculine-inspired wardrobes distort gender conventions, as does the sexually aggressive behavior of both female performers. The performance of explicit same-sex sexual desire motivating the story-line is complicated by other opposite-sex allusions made throughout the video, such as one scene portraying Madonna stepping provocatively over the heads of a row of men sitting on a couch in pursuit of Spears. The sexual desire performed in the video becomes only more ambiguous when the celebrity personas of each singer are likewise mixed into the equation. Conclusively, the sexuality performed in Spears' "Me Against the Music" video is highly ambiguous and recognizable as such.¹⁷

From just these few examples it is clear that the performance of ambiguous sexualities is recognizable in a plethora of verbal and visual signs. Given that the subject addressed here is ambiguity and the objective of such performances is often to obscure recognizable boundaries, there is no coherent semiotic or structural formula for determining what is or is not an ambiguous sexuality, and it would be inappropriate to impose a rigid structure on such fluid signs. However, I propose a few possible manners in which to navigate the complexity of these signs, thereby mapping this ambiguity within musicians' performances. Ultimately, ambiguity itself becomes the marker, which, as demonstrated by the above examples, is loaded with insinuation and the continual, active dodg-

ing of conventional boundaries of sexuality. Having established the contingent, but recognizable character of ambiguous sexualities, it is now possible to examine how these performances demonstrate resistance. I acknowledge that all manners of resistance, be they social, cultural, or political, among others, serve to agitate and potentially chip away at or otherwise alter the larger bloc of dominant hegemonic power, as the components of any hegemony are intricately related and delicately balanced.¹⁸ To discuss particular manifestations of resistance in the work of musicians who perform ambiguous sexuality, I turn again to *The Advocate's* spread on "Hot Queer Beats," and the work of The Ditty Bops and The Ex-Boyfriends.

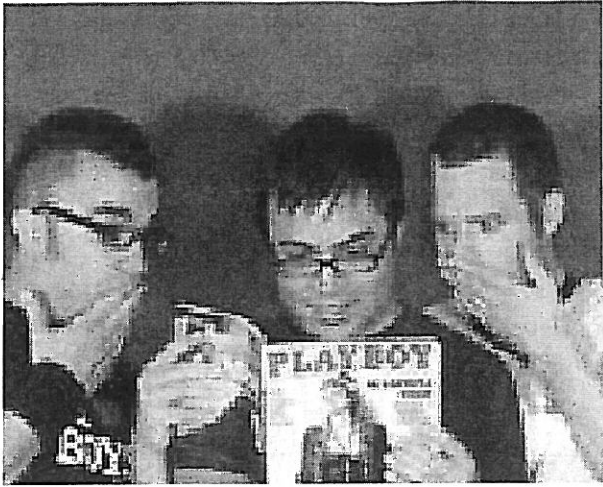
The Ditty Bops defy boundaries not just with their sexuality, but also with their music and performance. As *Advocate* writer Michele Kort describes, the music of The Ditty Bops,



a duo of Abby DeWald and Amanda Berret (partners in their personal lives and music careers), mixes "ragtime, music hall, folk, and whatnot," with instruments such as the mandolin, dulcimer and a washboard, and put on stage performances including costumes, skits, slide shows, ballerinas and even a winged male angel playing a harp.¹⁹ The boundary-less music

of The Ditty Bops provides an interesting site of musical resistance, but what is most useful for demonstrating resistance through sexuality is evident not in their music, but in their promotional material, specifically a calendar they have released. The cover image of "The Ditty Bops Bicycle Bikini 2006 Calendar" is set in a classroom, with DeWald and Berret in modest bikinis, un-provocatively writing on a chalkboard, their gazes at each other. DeWald explains the calendar with the question, "Why not have a calendar of girls with little tits and big asses wearing bikinis, on bicycles?"²⁰ This performance is a visual way of speaking back; their use of parody and satire provides a fun, accessible way to counter and critique the proliferation of misogynistic, heterocentric images from typical calendars of women with cars or motorcycles. Through a performance engaging their sexualities, The Ditty Bops are able to generate an effective resistance, at least through the propagation of counter-images and at most through the dissemination of counter-ideology.

The Ex-Boyfriends are identified as a "mostly gay trio" of men whose very name speaks ambiguity; are they referring to their ex-boyfriends, or identifying themselves as ex-boyfriends, or suggesting they are each other's ex-boyfriends? The group represents a mix of sexualities—two identifying as gay, and one as straight. They make an effort to dodge industry boundaries, appealing to both gay and mainstream indie rock audiences, as well as playing on their disparate sexual desires in band photos.²¹ One such photo depicts one band member intently reading *Playboy* while the other two look over his shoulders with mock gestures of shock at the magazine.²² The cover of the 1985 *Playboy* notably features Madonna, a detail which further complicates the play on expressions of sexuality. As with The Ditty Bops' calendar, this image draws attention to norms associated While the members of the Ex-Boyfriends identify with hegemonically accepted sexualities, their resistance comes from the way in which they defy taboos by unabashedly mixing in the



social, cultural and economic space of the music industry. In most instances it is assumed that gay musicians stick together and are located in marginalized gay scenes. As one band member explains, they must struggle to avoid becoming a novelty or being pigeonholed: "Everyone wants a gay band to be the Scissor Sisters nowadays."²³ But the Ex-Boyfriends refuse to be reduced to their sexualities. Instead, they flout industry conventions by incorporating both straight and gay members and intentionally appealing to a wider, mixed audience with their catchy punk/pop music.

In the discussion of intentional resistance demonstrated through ambiguity and sexuality, it is also useful to return to the rhetoric of Dangerous Muse. Upon announcing their appearance in *The Advocate* on their "myspace.com" website, Dangerous Muse had this to say:

The article focuses on the music and highlights Dangerous Muse's involvement in a new ambi-sexual movement and musical revolution that seems to be developing from in larger cities like New York and Los Angeles. This movement encourages utmost individualism and embraces the permutations of behavioral disassociation from gender and sexual orientation stereotypes by facilitating the destruction of these social constructs.²⁴

This amounts to a mission statement on ambiguity and reveals the intentionality, as well as the queer theory behind the musicians' performance

as resistance. It is clear from this and the above examples that resistance is an integral part of these musicians' performances, regardless of the degree to which the resistance is intentional or just happens in the course of putting on a good show.

The next problematic involved in the search for broader efficacy in the performances described above must negotiate a move from the performer's rhetoric of resistance to the potential for resistance from others: If musicians' performances of ambiguous sexuality display resistance, how might these performances provide an impetus for others, such as fans, to perform their own rebellions? In other words, how might the resistance found in musicians' performances stimulate potential resistance from others?

To address these questions I turn to Todd Hayne's 1998 film *Velvet Goldmine*, which fictionally retells the seventies glam rock music scene. Hayne's film imagines and visually depicts such a chain of active resistance, thereby providing a valuable text through which to discuss a move from the performance of celebrity musicians to the potential resistance performed by individuals and groups of fans. One useful example from *Velvet Goldmine* involves the character Arthur Stuart (Christian Bale) who, as an adult, is reconstructing the truth behind the life and death of Brian Slade (Jonathan Rhys Meyers), a fictional Bowie-like glam rocker. In the film, seeing Slade's performance of androgyny and rhetoric of bisexuality on TV and in newspapers opens a space for a teenaged Arthur to explore his own emerging gay sexuality. Slade's highly publicized performance and rhetoric is an impetus for Arthur to (at least imagine) coming out to his parents, shed his trench coat and walk in the streets wearing a glam outfit, and even try to make eye contact with other glam boys.

Philip Auslander addresses these scenes in his recent study, *Performing Glam Rock: gender and theatricality in popular music*, by concluding that:

Glam provided very public images of alternative ways of imagining gender and sexuality, images that audiences seized upon and from which they constructed the musicians' identities and articulated those [projected] identities to their own. The demand for the freedom to explore and construct one's identity in terms of gender, sexuality or any other terms, is glam rock's most important legacy.²⁵

Auslander does well to acknowledge the efficacy in popular musicians' performances of various sexualities. However, he locates that efficacy only at the level of individual fans' very personal experiences. While this is an important move in the argument for the efficacy of these performances, it is critical to move beyond the strictly individual; a broader argument must connect the effects that glam and other ambiguous performance had on individuals' private lives to other types of public, potentially political or cultural action.

Another scene in *Velvet Goldmine* aids a broader argument as it imagines the public efficacy of Slade's performance: Early in the film, the audience is taken through Arthur's flashback to the high point of Slade's career. In the form of a BBC televised report on the rising star, we are given clips of Slade's rhetoric on sexuality – "everyone's bisexual" – and given a glimpse of how influential he has become, including a list of now famous gender-bending glam rockers. A BBC reporter is also on the streets interviewing young glam rock fans waiting to get into a Slade concert. The most notable moment of this newsreel-like montage is when a young man, with his arm around a young woman, repeats Slade's rhetoric of bisexuality saying about the boys and girls to whom he is attracted, "they're all the same." He then pauses and speaks directly to the reporter, questioning "Aren't they, Mr. BBC?" This confrontational question is followed by an uncomfortable silence as the BBC reporter is left speechless.

This sequence alludes to numerous effects resulting from Slade's performance of ambiguous sexuality: the adults' negative reaction, the list of other musicians emerging in Slade's

shadow, and most important for my discussion, the young fans mimicking Slade's performance in the streets, resisting the established authority. These scenes are layered with performances, repetition and mimicry. The act of parroting Slade's performance becomes a political tool in this moment. As with previous examples discussed above, this mimicry becomes a weapon for talking back within the space of the film.

These imitative performances are potentially performative.²⁶ In Stuart Hall's terms, these representations, through performance, constitute that which they purport to represent.²⁷ In this instance, the performative actions and language do not necessarily constitute a bisexual identity in this anonymous young glam rock fan on the street; that is not significant for the purposes of this analysis. Rather, his performance of bisexuality constitutes him as a rebel, as a resister. He is talking back to "Mr. BBC" and demonstrating resistance. It is also clear that his resistance makes "Mr. BBC" uncomfortable, especially as the young fan is denying the boundary, and hence the authority usually endowed to those behind the camera, or by association, those endowed with power through cultural hegemony.

It does not matter that this young man's actions and words are all a show, mere mimicry of Slade's own inauthentic performance. What matters is simply that he is enacting resistance. He is talking back to authority – here signified by the faceless figure of the BBC reporter – and making that authority uncomfortable. In this montage sequence we can see a chain of articulation accomplishing something. Through performance, glam rockers and their fans are resisting hetero norms, disarticulating sexuality from gender from sex, and rearticulating a defiant performance of sexuality to political resistance.

Though *Velvet Goldmine* provides a fictional account, the film imagines the resistance made possible by glam rock performance; the film's very existence successfully demonstrates the potential generated by a musician's performance of ambiguous sexuality. In this case,

the historical performances of glam rockers are felt in the production of a contemporary film, which remembers and furthers the possibilities for effective resistance.

Whether a fan is parroting a fictional Brian Slade's rhetoric of bisexuality, a young man is wearing eyeliner to be 'cool' like Billie Joe Armstrong, a young woman wears a tie because it 'looked hot' on Britney Spears, or displays a Ditty Bops' calendar on her school locker, an individual enacting this performative mimicry is presenting a type of resistance, regardless of their motives or level of intentionality. In this way of displaying the rhetoric of otherwise intimate and private sexuality in a public space, such individuals are talking back, demonstrating resistance and agitating the hegemonic discipline that marginalizes ambiguous sexualities.

Having located individual resistance, from the performance of ambiguous sexualities in public space through the overt resistance performed by musicians to the imagined parroting of those performances by fans and followers, I posit the main and final question of this argument: Does the performance of ambiguous sexualities hold the potential for broader cultural or political efficacy? In response to this question I put forth two possible answers relating to hegemonic articulation and queer critique.

First, I turn to Hall to address why, with the proliferation of performances of ambiguous sexuality, no larger revolution is taking place. In "The Problem of Ideology" Hall concludes that there is no necessary correspondence between people's material conditions and the actions they will take to change those conditions. He rejects determinism and instead asserts determinacy as that which establishes possibilities, such as those found in the examples described above, but does not determine any closure.²⁸ Rather, social movements are related to historical contexts, and public performance may or may not lead to community building or social action. For example, the moment and location in which Dangerous Muse is performing correlates to a "nouveau sexual revolution" with a larger group

of people taking up the ideology and rhetoric of ambiguous sexuality, while other examples are not currently associated with such awareness or revolutionary intent.

Furthermore, some of these performances demonstrate the potential for broader action, though not necessarily revolution, as they become articulated to a larger queer hegemonic bloc. For instance, *The Advocate's* "Music Issue" ended with a spread on the Coachella festival highlighting a performance by Madonna, thereby articulating a more mainstream, well-known and influential celebrity to the "new queer" musicians. Likewise, the very fact that Dangerous Muse is quoted making statements such as "There's no such thing as out anymore" in *The Advocate* – a national "gay and lesbian newsmagazine" – shows how the larger queer bloc is incorporating various discourses on sexuality. These musicians' performances consequently demonstrate the potential for larger resistance via the queer hegemonic bloc to which they are, or can be articulated.

Second, the power of resistance here functions as a queer critique. The queer critique is visible in these performances and has value in the way it destabilizes regulatory fictions and discipline in a Foucauldian sense. It has the power to disrupt the ideological – commonsensical – to the degree that ideology is manifest in relation to sexuality, which, as Foucault has illustrated at length, is quite substantial.²⁹ The elements of queer critique are operating at full force in various ways in many of the performances presented above, explicitly and intentionally as with Dangerous Muse, perhaps unintentionally with the performances of Madonna and Spears, and to varying degrees in between with the other performers. Even without a larger, cohesive movement of resistance, these performances of ambiguous sexuality are able to critique and agitate the dominant hegemony which otherwise regulates and represses non-normative sexualities.

So even if no revolutionary coalition forms from these performances – and according to Hall, as well as the history of continu-

ous rebellious performance and its resulting mimicry, there is no guarantee that it will – the individual private and public acts of resistance do continually agitate hegemonic blocs as they relate to sexuality. In other words, it is a potentially positive process by which these performances become marginally assimilated into cultural hegemony, or through which they critique the hegemonic power. The relationship between the personal, social, cultural and political becomes a key avenue by which effective resistance and hegemonic change are made possible through the musical performance of ambiguous sexualities.

Notes

Allison McGuffie is a Film Studies graduate student at the University of Iowa. Her scholarly writings address the power of marginal positions to critique and challenge dominant approaches to the criticism, theory and making of film and media culture. Her research focuses on issues of Queer media and African cinema.

¹ Figures 1, 2 and 3 courtesy of *The Advocate*.

² "The Music Issue," *The Advocate*, April 25, 2006, cover, 46-57.

³ In his discussion of the regimes of ethnic representation, Stuart Hall expands the definition beyond a mimetic, "after-the-event" role of representation to assert the discursive construction of meaning, the constitutive role of representation. See "New Ethnicities," in *Stuart Hall Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley, Kuan-Hsing Chen (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 441-449.

⁴ A less generous, but equally important move would address the hierarchical binary which seeks to define authenticity and posits "authentic" as more worthy and valuable than "inauthentic." The process by which authentic versus inauthentic is sought out and revealed, especially in the realm of sexuality, is one of the many ways power penetrates the intimate lives of individuals in a Foucauldian sense. This issue is important to address, but must be left to the space of another inquiry. In the realm of this project, my understanding of a call for authenticity to be a call for a base for political action is set forth to address some of the very real concerns within the queer community regarding how our sources of enjoyment and entertainment might simultaneously work in our favor in the course of our daily social and political struggles.

⁵ For each positive potential effect, it is inevitable to likewise note the negative potential inherent in hegemonic movement, such as when repressive, dominant hegemonic blocs incorporate token signs of resistance, thereby

pacifying and negating the power of that resistance. For example, one could criticize many of the following performances, noting that their displays of resistance are subsumed by capital interests, which market the signs of resistance as commodities to be sold and purchased. While understanding these processes is likewise critical when examining any display of resistance, it is too easy to simply discredit their effectiveness. It is a more challenging, but equally important task to recognize and discuss the forces at work on dominant hegemony, forces that slowly and subtly open space for the possibilities of positive social change.

⁶ See Stuart Hall, "The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without guarantees," and "New Ethnicities," in *Stuart Hall Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley, Kuan-Hsing Chen (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁷ In particular, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999).

⁸ For further theoretical background, see Judith Butler, "Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse," in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), 324-340.

⁹ Adam B. Vary, "Rhythm and Muse," in "The Music Issue," in *The Advocate*, April 25, 2006, 46-48.

¹⁰ Vary, "Rhythm and Muse," 47-48.

¹¹ Their first single "debuted at number 2 on the iTunes dance charts with practically zero promotion." Vary, "Rhythm and Muse," 47.

¹² *The Advocate*, January 24, 1995.

¹³ "Idiot boys," *The Advocate*, November 23, 2004.

¹⁴ This story is retold by the band during interview in "For the Love of Franz Ferdinand," *The Advocate*, June 22, 2004.

¹⁵ Franz Ferdinand, "Michael," on *Franz Ferdinand*, musicians Alex Kapranos, Nick McCarthy, Bob Hardy, Paul Thomas, producer Tor Johansson (Malmo, Sweden: Domino Records, 2004).

¹⁶ "For the Love of Franz Ferdinand."

¹⁷ This example raises a particular problematic from a feminist perspective: the inference of same-sex female sex is often appropriated by straight men for their own pleasure. Notably, queer and feminist intentions do not always neatly align. Furthermore, to dismiss two women making sexual advances at each other as only a 'bad object' of patriarchy is to further deny and make invisible the 'reality' of women desiring women. At such an intersection of tension between queer and feminist goals, the problems inherent in the conflation of sexuality with gender again become apparent.

¹⁸ For clarification, I am referring specifically to the social, cultural, political, economic, etc. hegemonic landscape of the U.S. Any similar analysis rooted in other national or cultural contexts would need to be largely re-thought to meet the specific needs of that nation or culture. I do not presume to speak of a universal efficacy.

¹⁹ Michele Kort, "Gotta have my Bops," in *The Advocate*,

April 25, 2006, 49.

²⁰ Kork, "Gotta have my Bops," 49.

²¹ Kurt B. Reighley, "Ex men," in "The Music Issue," in *The Advocate*, April 25, 2006, 52.

²² Figure 4 courtesy of Michelle Blioux Photography, San Francisco, CA.

²³ Chris Ohnesorge, of The Ex-Boyfriends, e-mail message to author, October 11, 2006.

²⁴ "On the Cover of 'The Advocate,'" in *News*, www.myspace.com/dangerousmuse (accessed 4/26/05).

²⁵ Phillip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: gender and theatricality in popular music* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006), 234.

²⁶ My use of theory of performativity is predominately inflected by Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, as that which creates itself through repeated performance.

²⁷ Hall, "New Ethnicities."

²⁸ Stuart Hall, "The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without guarantees."

²⁹ The understanding of power used here is related to Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

Call for Papers

Queerness and Violence

Queer Studies Graduate Symposium

University of California, Davis June 2, 2007

The war on terror has become the monolithic face of violence in dominant cultural discourse at the same time that hate crime legislation has been positioned as a marker of progress for the gay rights movement. Both of these moves create an obsession with safety while simultaneously ignoring other violences, such as police violence, domestic violence, the prison industrial complex, and violences produced by medical establishments, that continuously take and harm lives.

In what ways have queerness and violence been linked? How and why might this link be productive, and what are its limitations? What counts as violence? How might queerness itself function violently, either as a violence against heteronormativity and gender binaries, or a neoliberal, violent homonormativity/homonationalism? If queerness is not always automatically transgressive, how might we rethink what we mean by violence? How has violence been positioned as that which is both outside of and uniting queer/trans communities, linked to a call for state intervention and buttressing discourses of human rights? In what ways can we think of subjectivity itself as violent, and how might queerness function in this process? What is the time of violence, and what relationship might alternative temporalities have to particular violences? This symposium seeks to interrogate the ways queerness and violence function together in contemporary as well as historical practices, and puzzle out creative possibilities for transformation and resistance. We invite scholarship from a broad range of disciplines, especially interdisciplinary work in queer theory and transgender theory. We also welcome papers that engage activism and community organizing.

Possible topics include (but are not limited to):

Resistances to Violence Queerness as violence (to heteronormativity, gender norms etc. as well as violence of homonormativity) State violences/state responses to violences Violence and public/private space Queerness and Terrorism/Queer Terrorism Violences of in/visibility, Violence and pleasure/BDSM Pain/and embodiment/and pleasure Performances of violence/queer rage, Embodiment and violence/violent embodiment Violent representations/representations of violence/spectacles of violence, Human rights discourses, Violences of language, narrative violences, il/legibility Sexual violences/relationship violences, Homonormativity/neoliberalism/globalization/violences of capital Violences within queer/trans communities, Aftermaths of violence (trauma, memorial, work of mourning, etc.) Violence of disciplinarity, Violences of home.

Please send 250-500 word abstracts and with a CV to queersymposium2007_at_gmail.com by FEBRUARY 19, 2007. Along with this abstract, please indicate if your presentation requires any AV equipment. Acceptances will be sent out by MARCH 14, 2007. For more information, email Cathy Hannabach, Toby Beauchamp, and Cynthia Degnan at queersymposium2007_at_gmail.com.

The 2006 Philip Brett Award for Outstanding Monograph or Longer Work

The 2006 Philip Brett Award Selection Committee is delighted to honor Nadine Hubbs with the 2006 Philip Brett Award for Outstanding Monograph for her fall 2004 *The Queer Composition of America's Sound: Gay Modernists, American Music, and National Identity*, published by the University of California Press. Dr. Hubbs' work has already been garnered several honors: the Irwin Lowens Book Award from the Society for American Music (2006), Honorable Mention in the competition for the John Boswell Prize given by the Committee on Gay and Lesbian History of the American Historical Association, and being listed as an "Outstanding Academic Title" by Choice.

Nadine Hubbs is an Associate Professor of Music Theory and Women's Studies at the University of Michigan. She also directs the University of Michigan Lesbian-Gay-Queer Research Initiative. She has published articles on popular music figures such as Morrissey, Radiohead, Gloria Gaynor, as well as more traditional subjects such as organicism, Schenkerian analysis, and contemporary classical music.

The Award Committee is pleased to bestow Dr. Hubb's monograph with this award for its pioneering hypotheses concerning constructions of twentieth-century American music, especially in the intersections between the national, the social, and the sexual. Indeed, this book builds upon Philip Brett's own work, extending his subtle explorations of musicality and sexuality to illuminate the lives and music of gay American composers. As historian George Chauncey has noted: "In this remarkable book, Nadine Hubbs demonstrates that our understanding of modernist American culture will remain impoverished so long as we ignore the gay social networks and patronage and distinctly queer sensibilities and idioms that influenced (to varying degrees) the work of the great modernist composers Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson, Samuel Barber, Ned Rorem, and Leonard Bernstein, among others. Deeply learned, theoretically sophisticated, and powerfully argued, this is a landmark study, which is sure to inspire a new generation of work drawing together and advancing the insights of musicology, feminist and queer theory, and American cultural history." One of the eloquent nominations sent to the Award Committee predicts a lasting influence for Professor Hubb's book: "I truly believe that this book well—and should—prove vital to future conversations about our developing national identity in twenty-first century America." Another nominator, a professor who taught the text in an Introduction to Musicology seminar, wrote that the "book is structured so that its constant exploration of certain musicians' gay identity provokes a cascade of questions about what American identity could possible mean." She also noted that her students were "more stirred up by this book than anything else they read in the academic year." The monograph richly deserves the award not only for stirring new thought and work but also for highlighting this critical link between sexuality and 20th-century American musical modernism.

The 2006 Philip Brett Award for Outstanding Article or Shorter Work

The 2006 Philip Brett Award Selection Committee is delighted to honor Sherry Lee, Assistant Professor of History and Culture at the University of Toronto, with the 2006 Philip Brett Award for Outstanding Article for her “A Florentine Tragedy, or Woman as Mirror,” which was published in the March 2006 issue of the Cambridge Opera Journal.

Dr. Lee taught at the University of British Columbia and the University of Victoria before joining the faculty at the University of Toronto in 2006. She researches music and culture in fin-de-siècle Vienna, music-text relationships in opera, electroacoustic and spectral composition, and new music in Canada. In 2006 she was a fellow of the Mannes Institute for Advanced Studies in Music Theory at Yale.

Dr. Lee’s article, which the committee strongly recommends to the entire Society for the reasons given below, addresses the overt and subtextual erotics of the three central characters in Alexander Zemlinsky’s one-act opera *A Florentine Tragedy*. The 1917 opera was based rather literally on the play by Oscar Wilde, the resulting libretto was characterized by Adorno in 1959 as “one of those crass neo-Romantic libretti which ... deserve only to be consigned to the flames.” In Dr. Lee’s own words, the opera “features an erotic triangle—a woman, her husband, and her lover—that erupts into violence, murder, and a shocking dramatic reversal at the end.” Dr. Lee cogently and clearly dissects not only the role of the woman as a “passive mirror in whose eyes the male characters see their own images” and the commercialization of female sexuality, but also the Freudian triangular model of male homosexual subjectivity and the opera’s male homosocial and erotic subtexts. In the nomination for the article, the nominator wrote, “She persuasively goes beyond a ‘merely sexual reading,’ and invokes the manifold manifestations of desire, especially narcissism, as a more persuasive hermeneutic context. What is more, she bases her interpretation on sophisticated analysis not only of the text, but also of the music.” Indeed, it was this latter aspect that particularly impressed the committee, as Dr. Lee, having addressed more traditional aspects of opera criticism in the first half of the article, deftly focuses on an analysis of how the music itself works through motivic interplay, voice register, and musical symbolism to reveal the homoerotic subtext and the opera’s conclusion in which the couple’s sexual passions are reignited by the murder of the lover. In its combination of close musical analysis and cultural theory, it continues the kind of work created by the scholar for whom this award is named.

Report from the 2006 LGBTQ Study Group Business Meeting November 3, 2006--Los Angeles

1. Report of the Secretary-Treasurer
 - A. Membership Report (see below)
 - B. Financial Report (see below)
2. Report of the Co-Chairs
3. Election of LGBTQ Study Group Board members
4. Announcements of the 2005 winner of the Philip Brett Award
5. Other Business

Secretary-Treasurer's Report 2006

| | |
|---|-------------|
| 2006 total LGTBQSG members (down 11 from 12-31-05) | 63 |
| Carryover balance from 2005 | +\$1,539.36 |
| Additional income from 2006 memberships | +\$1,037.00 |
| Additional income from back issues of the Newsletter | +\$20.00 |
| Certificate of Deposit plus interest (does not incl. interest maturity 12/03/06) | +\$1,089.14 |
| Debts incurred including expense of annual incorporation in CO; LGBTQ Study Group <i>Newsletter</i> spring expenses | -\$342.76 |

TOTAL LGBTQ STUDY GROUP ASSETS AS OF Octobert 31. 2006 (debts from Los Angeles party, program speaer, and fall Newsletter expenses not included) +\$3,307.74

PHILIP BRETT AWARD:

Total value of Philip Brett Award Endowment as of Oct. 1, 2006 \$24, 537.00

2005 LGBTQ member contributions to the Phlip Brett Award, to be forwarded on for investment by the AMS before Dec. 31, 2006, not included above +\$173.00