

The Newsletter for the LGBTQ Study Group

of the American Musicological Society

volume seventeen, number one (Spring, 2007)

issn: 1556-0406

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.

Members of the Board

Judith Peraino, Co-Chair

William Meredith, Co-Chair

Ivan Raykoff, Secretary-Treasurer

Robert Torre, Editor of The Newsletter

Luke S. Jensen, Member-at-Large

Christina Baade, Member-at-Large

Stephan Pennington, Member-at-Large

Megan Jenkins, Member-at-Large

Inside this issue

NEWS FROM THE EDITOR

page 2

ESSAY

“Keeping Time with Lesbians on Ecstasy” by Judith Halberstam

page 3

ANNOUNCEMENT

Call for Papers

page 11

Subscriptions & Contributions:

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.

Mailing List:

The Newsletter mailing list is maintained by the Secretary-Treasurer of the LGBTQ Study Group and is not offered to any other organization.

Photocopying:

Libraries are authorized to photocopy materials from The Newsletter for the purposes of course reserve reading at the rate of one copy for every 15 students, and may re-use copies for other courses or for the same course offered subsequently. Back issues are available from the Secretary-Treasurer.

From the Editor:

Hello All! This edition of the Newsletter is especially exciting, since most of it is devoted to Judith Halberstam's provocative essay, "Keeping Time with Lesbians on Ecstasy," which she presented at the Fall 2007 meeting of the LGBTQ Study Group in Los Angeles. It will also appear in the next issue of the journal *Women and Music*. A response piece by Judith Peraino, Co-chair of the LGBTQ Study Group, will follow the essay.

Finally, the next Newsletter will feature recent syllabi from courses on sexuality and music. If you taught such a course recently, I would be happy to include it in the Newsletter. Please submit them to: ratorre@wisc.edu by October 15, 2007.

All best wishes,
Robert

Philip Brett Memorial

The Music Department at the University of California, Riverside, has chosen a site at the Arts Building to dedicate as the Philip Brett Memorial Peace Garden. Since Philip was instrumental in moving the Music Department into this building, it is fitting that a garden in his honor should be constructed at this site.

Philip was an artist who loved gardening, and the Philip Brett Memorial Peace Garden, in the style of a traditional Japanese dry garden and designed by internationally renowned landscape architect Dr. Takeo Uesugi, is a place that he would himself have loved. Here, his legacy will be honored, and the garden will serve as a living testimony to his accomplishments and his exemplary service to music, musicology, and the University of California. It would honor him greatly if this garden were to serve as an inspiration to others to uphold his standard of aesthetic and intellectual service and contribution.

We are inviting friends and colleagues to make contributions in support of this project. All donations will be honored by inscribing the donor's name on a brass plate that will be installed in the garden itself.

We are hoping to have a dedication ceremony on October 16, 2007. That will be the fifth anniversary of Philip's death. If you would like to contribute, please do so by credit card or check at the project's website: <http://www.music.ucr.edu/brettgarden>. There you can view drawings of the garden and find more information.

Thank you for considering this request.

George Haggerty, Professor of English
Walter Clark, Chair, Music Department

Keeping Time with Lesbians On Ecstasy by Judith Halberstam

In a new project on “the politics of knowledge in an age of stupidity,” titled *Dude, Where’s My Theory*, I have been trying to produce, identify and enact alternative modes of knowledge production associated with queer modes of being. My intent in this book is to engage and participate in “theories of the alternative” which I distinguish from theories of the dominant. The alternative, in recent years, has been cast as a utopian and potentially naïve project and in general in academia, a hierarchy of knowledge production prevails within which theories of the dominant are constituted as “high” theory and theories of the alternative constitute “low” theory. The “alternative” in my project constitutes a set of practices already available to cultural producers, theorists and activists and already in use in a variety of contexts; but these practices and actions are not necessarily considered within a unifying rubric and so can easily be overlooked even though they constitute a *mélange* of micro-events which actually do offer another space, option or mode of thinking that opposes, diverges from and even resists global capitalism and its logics.

In this paper, I turn to a contemporary queer band, Lesbians On Ecstasy (LOE), who present alternative forms of cultural production by playing with the logic of the cover song. Conventionally, covering a song originally crafted by another group or musician has been cast as either a tribute (see recent albums where performers sing the songs of Bob Dylan or Leonard Cohen), a pathetic re-enactment (the cover band who tries to reproduce mimetically or channel the original band), a quirky interpretation (the French band Nouvelle Vague has recently created lounge versions of new wave songs), or a revisiting of a timeless classic (anyone singing “My Way” for example). The relationship between the original and the cover version is set up within the logic of the “cover” to privilege the original and even

to strengthen the notion of originality itself; and it might even confirm some dire pronouncements about postmodern culture as a pastiche of everything that came before. Performing a cover version is, of course, an utterly ordinary thing to do and most musicians will include one or two covers in their repertoire. So what would make it queer, different or alternative? In what follows, I try to flesh out a queer theory of the cover version and I situate the re-performance of a song in relation to queer forms of history, community, friendship and generationality. There is nothing *necessarily* queer or alternative about the cover song but the performance of covers can be queered and in the process new modes of thinking about time and generational transmission and memory can be opened up.

Contemporary queer performers try deliberately to scramble the predictability of generational models of transmission and the static relations between copies and originals in their performances and they highlight and emphasize an investment in impersonation, imitation and derivation. But, they do so in a way that cannot be called ironic or camp. The queerest formulation of the relationship between copy and original came, of course, from Judith Butler’s pioneering work from the early nineties in which she contested one of the foundations of homophobia: namely, the idea that the relationship between hetero and homo was the relationship of an original to a copy. Using the model of butch-femme, Butler contested the idea that butch and femme lesbians were somehow producing bad copies or cover versions of heterosexual couplehood or gendered relationality, and she showed, through a complex, post-structuralist formulation, that the relationship between copy and original can be reversed. In the process, the idea of a congruence between heterosexuality and originality is lost. The heterosexual pairing of male and female, in other words, only looks

natural in comparison to the homosexual pairing of butch-femme; and the copy, in fact, lends the air of credibility to the original thereby making the original dependent upon the copy rather than the other way around.¹

Butler's formulation has resonated across multiple feminist and queer projects and is probably one of the most important critical gestures of the 1990s! Queer theory seized upon Butler's formulation and it allowed for the critical investment in modes of imitation, impersonation, superficiality and subversion that were otherwise unthinkable. Since the publication of *Gender Trouble*, other theorists have since challenged the "gender trouble" paradigm and have argued that the reversal of the relationship between copy and original can inadvertently flatten out history and make all performances that come earlier seem anachronistic in relation to all performances that come later. This, at any rate, is the argument of a brilliant essay by Elizabeth Freeman titled "Unpacking History" in which Freeman takes Butler's model to task for ruling out the possibility of cross-historical identifications; accordingly, Freeman adapts Butler's formulation and comes up with the idea of "temporal drag," in which a subject in one historical moment might actually inhabit the sensibility or set of desiring structures of a subject in another historical moment. In my reading of LOE's performances of the cover song and in a general theory about "covering" as a queer act, I will use Butler's theorization of the relations between copies and originals and Freeman's understanding of the need for cross-historical identification to argue for a complex structure of queer reproduction.

In queer subcultures, I am willing to propose, many performers re-imagine gender, race, sexuality, age and politics and in the process they produce new models of temporality, history and identity. Temporality has recently become a hot topic in queer theory and in my own work on what I call "queer temporality," I claim that queers inhabit time and time bound narratives in necessarily different ways to straight people. Many young couples mark time according to the dictates of reproduction, marriage and birth, and

then these same temporal schemes lead inexorably to temporal markers like "mid-life crisis," menopause, pre-retirement" and retirement years. Work and birth, in other words, become the logics of those bourgeois and reproductive life narratives that seem to unfold naturally but are actually pushed along by eager families and friends and strategies of capital accumulation and investment. For people who either stay outside of reproductive logics, or refuse the futuristic logics of investment, insurance and retirement, and for those who live outside of the workforce or in vexed relations to money, work and family, other temporal schemes exist and other temporal schemes guide the lie narrative. Some examples: back in the 1950s when he wrote *Naked Lunch*, William Burroughs, in line with the Beat poet ethos of living on the road, wrote about junky time, the temporality ordered around addiction, the next fix, the radical practice of consumption without production and he articulated explicitly the ways in which junk messed up capitalist notions of productivity, moderation, conservation and so on. Or, certain AIDS narratives from the early '90s, like *Close to the Knives (A Memoir of Disintegration)* by David Wojnarowicz, articulate ferocious fantasies about living on borrowed time. In Wojnarowicz's work, the HIV-positive body becomes a living time bomb set to detonate at any moment and he sees himself as a weapon to be used on the government, the homophobes and American complacency. In these queer narratives, temporality is disintegrated, discordant, incoherent; life is unscheduled and unpredictable, time itself is queer.

Some queer musicians, like Gretchen Philips formerly of Two Nice Girls, claim that the cover version is always queer.² The cover is like a drag act, a way of inhabiting another persona or body, or voice, and it is a way of doing so while self-consciously registering the performance rather than merely blending into the original. When Rufus Wainwright performs a version of "Chelsea Hotel #2" by Leonard Cohen, for example, the song, famous for its unsentimental account of a tryst between Cohen and Janis Joplin, becomes instead a queer elegy to another anonymous gay

encounter. And when Patti Smith performed another Leonard Cohen song, “Gloria,” on her classic 1975 release *Horses*, she turns the song easily into a lesbian punk anthem, despite the fact that she admits easily to being heterosexual in her orientation. The lesbian pose, in this instance, is itself a cover version – she covers a song that also causes her to cover a different identity position and in the process she creates what she calls “positive anarchy.”³ In both of these cases, the original song really gets replaced by the cover version that makes it irredeemably queer.

It is within this context that Montreal based dyke band Lesbians on Ecstasy, who admit to being inspired by Latino Elvis impersonator extraordinaire El Vez, have created a cult following by playing electronic cover versions of lesbian classics by earnest dykeons like The Indigo Girls, Melissa Etheridge, kd lang and Traci Chapman. LOE take on the genre of dyke drama music but rather than just parodying it or casting it as maudlin, folksy and therefore anachronistic, they rework it for new audiences. The band may recycle the songs musically but they also hold on to some core sensibility in the song or in the tempo or the mood of the music and then they resituate the political messages for a new political context. More importantly, LOE, by blatantly lifting bits and pieces from other lesbian musicians – a bass line here, a chorus there, a lyric fragment, a sentiment, a concept – they re-imagine the meaning of community and property; they redefine lesbian culture and the process of making it; and they draw attention to the ways in which borrowing, lifting, grafting, copying and sampling are all lauded in relation to turn-table and DJ culture, but might be frowned upon when practiced so blatantly by queer musicians. Since queer, and particularly “lesbian,” is already synonymous with “derivative” (“woman like a man” in the words of Damien Rice), LOE’s acts of creative theft are a cheeky refusal of the imperative for lesbian to fade into background noise in relation to the more noisy identities that surround it.

LOE are Jackie Gallant, Fruity Frankie, Veronique Mystique and Bernie Bankrupt. Their project is the band is to re-imagine one version of

lesbian culture as if it were enacted “on ecstasy.” This act of creative reinvention constitutes history as a mode of revisiting the past through a deliberately distorted lens and focusing attention away from the whole and towards the part – it is a deliberately fetishistic history, a history of the insignificant, the forgettable and the failed. The band find moments in the music they reconstitute, moments of yearning or anxiety, revolt or rupture; they express their affection for the originals but willingly cut them up nonetheless. Bernie Bankrupt explains: “The irony is thickly layered on top of our music, but in the end we’re doing our best to make the most sincere, awesome versions of these songs that we can.”⁴ Bernie continues: “Maybe part of being feminists, women and lesbians is that we can’t really escape our sincerity. We kinda like the songs, too.” In other words, the band may be remaking the songs in totally new ways but this does not constitute a rejection of the originals, it actually tries to redefine the original versions and rethink the relationship between original and copy. It also situates “sincerity” at the heart of a lesbian aesthetic and rejects the association of all things queer with irony, camp, critical distance and innovation.

But LOE do not only make an intervention at the level of content. Certainly, the brilliance of LOE has much to do with the way they bury familiar and cozy lesbo classics in the static and fuzz of electronica, but their rewiring of the voice is at the heart of this project of deception. So, for example, LOE perform a gruff cover of the kd lang classic, “Constant Craving” which they rework as “Kundstant Kroving.” Here, the original emotion laden song is buried in metallic din and the original only peeks through in the rousing chorus. Also, the singer uses a voice modifier and so LOE take kd’s crooner cool and wring the velvet out of it – in order to ditch the sentimental swell (“even through the darkest phase/be it thick of thin/always someone marches brave/here beneath my skin”) and find the political and negative core of the song (“constant craving has always been,”), LOE literally scratch the voice, rough it up and turn the long, drawn out phrases into staccato rips. The “constant” no longer signifies long nights of

hopeless romantic desire but instead becomes a kind of accusation, an irritant, and “craving” is less of an urgent desire and more of a persistent activity that the song would stamp out. LOE refuse the virtuosity of lang’s performance and find the place of resistance in the song both in terms of voice and message – anti-consumerist message that links the recycling of romantic clichés to a capitalist production of the need to consume new products.

Notice that when kd lang covers other people’s songs, as she does on her last album, *Hymns of the 49th Parallel*, she reverses this process and takes emotionally intense songs like “Hallelujah,” elegies like “After the Gold Rush,” and turns them into torture-lite, her silky voice untangles the knots in the song and unravels the mystery. And when she turns to another queer song, Jane Siberry’s “Love is Everything,” the cover version attempts to dialogue with the original but ends up smoothing out the rough spots and the quavers in Siberry’s version; she covers up rather than expands upon the song’s syntax. Kd, ultimately, is more “homo” than “lesbo” if we take “homo” here to indicate a commitment to getting it right and “lesbo,” as defined by LOE, as a commitment to creative mutilation! kd’s dedication to harmony, to getting it right, to feeling, ultimately leads her to betray the songs. But, when LOE perform kd, they find the edge of sincerity in her song and turn it back upon itself in order to make it meaningful in ways that go beyond the cliché of unrequited love.

Queer voice takes on new meaning in the Lesbians On Ecstasy performances. And their move away from the velvet of kd lang’s voice reminds us that, in way, the queerness of any given musical performance does so often lie in the pitch. Just to give one example, African American disco queen Sylvester left his mark on music precisely through his use of the falsetto which he uses to confirm and celebrate his connection to women. In his marvelous live performance of “You Are My Friend,” a cover of a Patti Labelle song, Sylvester sings the high part of the song and leaves the low and growling bass to his “friend” Izora. Like the LOE, Sylvester uses the “cover” ver-

sion to pay tribute and to create queer musical genealogies. In an interview with RNB legend Patti LaBelle, Marc Anthony Neal asks the diva how she felt when Sylvester covered her 1977 song “You Are My Friend.” “Oh,” she answers, “that was awesome. And he was my buddy and he told me when he was going to record it and I said ‘wonderful.’ I loved his version of it – don’t need those jewelries, don’t need that hair.” Patti LaBelle names Sylvester as her “buddy” when talking about him singing her song, “You Are My Friend.” And she refers to the moment in the live version when Sylvester points to his female singers, Martha Wash and Izora Armstead, and says “these girls can sing, y’all...they don’t need those dresses, they don’t need those jewelries, they don’t need no hair...these girls can sing.” Patti LaBelle recognizes Sylvester’s act of covering her song as an act of friendship, a tribute of sorts and she takes great pleasure in the femininities produced by Sylvester, Martha and Izora. Sylvester’s relation to LaBelle takes the form of tribute, and his bond with Wash and to Armstead constitutes a vocal companionship; these modes of friendship cannot be characterized in terms of the relation of the fag to the fag-hag; the song, and the falsetto in which Sylvester recreates it, stage black gay femininity as an interwoven history shared by black sissies and their diva icons. The falsetto also shifts the scale of gender and creates a soundscape within which all the voices sound queer.

Sylvester, Martha and Izora do not wear their drag, they sing it. Sylvester’s falsetto, nestled as it is between the soaring range of Martha Wash and the booming bass of Izora, speaks to the listener of discord, performativity, black history and queer friendship. The falsetto, of course, takes multiple forms and plays a different sound in every throat: as the male diva strains to find the upper reaches of the male voice, his falsetto also cuts him loose from his anatomy and takes him into a sorority of female singers. Sylvester’s falsetto connects him to black female divas, to the queens’ throat, but it also highlights what Joon Lee calls “the joys of castration.” Jake Austen has characterized Sylvester’s voice as an “unnatural” falsetto and he makes a comparison, not unkindly,

to the “natural” falsettos of Eddie Kendricks or Smokey Robinson; Austen means no slur on Sylvester, rather he emphasizes that Sylvester’s voice is “strange” rather than silky, “thin” rather than full.⁵ He implies that the seemingly perverse qualities of Sylvester’s voice overtly link it and Sylvester to queerness and to gender deviance; they also link him, in all kinds of ways, to women. So, while some falsettos become the mark of another kind of masculinity, Sylvester’s, like Little Jimmy Scott’s, deliberately marks him as having and indeed cultivating the voice of woman. The falsetto, then, can be the trademark of a high-flying, an ecstatic even, masculinity, or it can be the tell tale sign of a perverse identification.

In many examples of falsetto singing the singer is marked as more or less masculine but the falsetto places him in an affirmative relation to femininity: first, when Prince sings with Rosie Gaines on a live version of “Nothing Compares to You,” his falsetto is situated by the song and by his interaction with Gaines as tortured, emotionally wrought, and only nominally heterosexual. Even the lyric, “nothing compares to you,” suggests that femininity is both a place of desire *and* identification for Prince. Desire may play out in the lyric but identification is legible in the voice. Also, the song was pioneered by Sinead O’Connor and now Prince seems to be covering his own song as Sinead has marked it. The interaction with Rosie Gaines emphasizes the back and forth nature of appropriation, authorship and reproduction and muddies the waters of originality and mimicry. Likewise, Maxwell, when he sings a version of Kate Bush’s song, “This Woman’s Work” similarly situates himself in a heterosexual matrix and in the place of the father. And yet, covering a woman’s song, about woman’s work, about child-bearing no less, and about the gulf between that work and the “craft of the father” leaves the listener with the impression that Maxwell partakes voluntarily in “this woman’s work” as he takes his melancholy falsetto higher and higher, and further away from the seemingly solid ground of paternity. The song, which has more of a celebratory feel when Kate Bush sings it, becomes melancholic in Maxwell’s rendition because, even as his voice strains to

reach the high notes, so the father strains to make the connection with the child that has come so easily for the mother. The song is moving and poignant precisely because it implies a model of fatherhood that must pass through the mother and in doing so, masculinity, identity and bodily coherence all seem fragile and vulnerable. In this cover version, Maxwell performs the impossible: he allies paternity with vulnerability but not weakness and in disconnecting paternity from authority, he produces new forms of masculinity, high pitched masculinity that is open but not shrill, questioning but not anxious, in relation to femininity but not competitive with it.

Both Prince and Maxwell sing a falsetto in a way that situates femininity as something to which the male might aspire and both use it in a song that is a cover version, a song sung by a woman and then reclaimed by the male falsetto. This relay of affection, affect, musical affiliation and queer pitch are also performed in complete sincerity with no trace of camp or irony, no hint of mockery, no tarnishing of the original. The cover versions do not even cast the original as queer, instead they queer the original itself by running its circuit of meaning back through the new version that recreates it as a literal musical bridge running between queer male voices and queer female voices, the falsetto and the contralto, the song as it was first sung and the song as it is remembered now, across time and space, queerly.

While a band like *The Indigo Girls* or a performer like Tracy Chapman, reached their audiences precisely by making sincerity, authenticity and personal address part of the vocal core of the song, LOE erase the specificity of the voice and turn melodic signature into collective chants. In a way they resignify the meaning of “sincerity” itself so that the sincere no longer only means “depth of feeling” but also refers to the texture of meaning, not the true but the blunt, not the genuine but the improvised: In their version of Tracy Chapman’s “Talking About A Revolution,” the song begins with a guitar lick and bass line reminiscent of Gang of Four and then runs with the energy of the song rather than its melody. As in many Le Tigre songs, the high-pitched voice of the singer

plays with and conjures a sense of hysteria that grows stronger as the song progresses. Chapman's strength of course lies in the way she marries calm to chaos in many of her songs and offers up lyrics like: "Poor people gonna rise up and take their share/Poor people gonna rise up and take what's theirs" but without changing tempo. The "revolution" that she is talking about on the first song of her debut album was both the linking of queer sounds to revolutionary sentiments but also the circling back around of Black folk music by Gil Scott Heron, Odetta, Paul Robeson and even Big Mama Thornton within a new political context. LOE match the talk about revolution with the energy and the dynamism of dark dance music. Chapman's anthem was released in 1988 in the midst of the Reagan-Bush era and LOE recognize the need in 2005 to return to revolutionary talk as we enter the second George W. Bush regime. The cover version also calls attention to the often-overlooked relations between race and genre – the racial classification of certain types of music and the impossibility of such generic delineations within a history of "love and theft."⁶

Part of the appeal of the concept of the cover song deployed by LOE lies in the complex temporality implied by act of dipping into (even a recent) musical past. A film like *Rock Star*, starring Mark Wahlberg, provides the typical narrative about cover bands and depicts the cover band as the bad copy, the cheap rip off that lacks originality and virtuosity; ultimately the film purports to reveal the crass consumerism behind all rock performances. As a maudlin film like *Rock Star* shows, the cover band inspires moral judgments precisely in the way that a drag act might. Obviously LOE are neither simply creating "covers" of the originals and nor are they impersonating the originals but they are performing what Elizabeth Freeman has called a form of "temporal drag." For Freeman, temporal drag works against postmodern forms of pastiche by operating as "a stubborn identification with a set of social coordinates that exceed one's own historical moment." The possibility of such contrary temporal identifications, Freeman suggests, forces us to ask: "what is the time of queer performativity?" LOE provides a

musical answer by reaching back into a historical grab bag of influences and layering their own dance music with intertextual signposts that not only point their new listeners back to Tracy Chapman, Melissa Etheridge and The Indigo Girls but also make counter-genealogies for contemporary alternative dance music.

If gay male singers like Rufus Wainwright, Hedwig and Anthony of Anthony and the Johnsons seek and find operatic registers and frameworks for their rehearsals of the tragi-dramas of exclusion, rejection, addiction, and if the Emo melodramatically perform the flawed nature of their own masculinity, LOE actively refuse the melancholia of temporal drag, they do not identify in other words with what has been lost to history, but instead they embrace the ecstasy of finding earlier grammars for the articulation of rage, rave and revolution. Like Tribe 8, they do not apologize for their queerness or their queer genders, they revel in its superiority. Tribe 8 tell their straight male fans that they are "checking out your babe," they sing about castration, *estro femmes*, *top bitch femmes*, *hapa girls*, *switch butches* and so on, producing, in the process, a taxonomy of queer lives and a dissonant record of *dyke punk* and *dyke genders*. And LOE echo the defiance in Tribe 8's songs by trying to inhabit that dissonance. In one last song by LOE, they slow down the tempo of their otherwise reckless romp through *lesbo classics* and they affect a fake earnest and soulful tone. The music swells as the singer carefully articulates the song's arch sentiment. "I," she sings, "want to manipulate my girlfriend, I want to play games with her head." Later, violins soar as the singer says she feels guilty about this naughty desire to mess with her lover but the jaunty beat says otherwise. The song's appeal lies in the contradictory relationship between its bouncy beat and its cold message and it serves ultimately less as a parody of lesbian sincerity and more of a fantasy of how the essential construction of lesbianism as "weepy," morose, lonely, as the blues, can come undone on ecstasy and in electronica to reveal a different *dyke musical temporality*.

Conclusion

When Sylvester “covers” Patti LaBelle and Maxwell remixes Kate Bush and Prince takes back a song he wrote for Sinéad O’Connor, when LOE recast Tracy Chapman and kd lang, a kind of ecstatic queer history has been made. All of these performances call for a different model of history – one capable of making connections between different forms of queer community, different kinds of voices and different historical moments. The model of history implied by the cover song is not the progressive unfolding of a narrative of assimilation, it is a jagged story of cathexis and repudiation, identification and disidentification, love and hate. By way of concluding this history on ecstasy, I want to end with Sylvester. The live version of “You Are My Friend,” begins with a beautiful passage in which Sylvester makes the song his own. He strips Patti LaBelle’s version down to a few repeated phrases and takes out some of the more narrative oriented lyrics. The song becomes a hymn to friendship lost and found and Sylvester’s voice closes in on the song’s emotional core. The queen dives into the sentimental heart of the song and he leaves the heterosexual narrative about lost love on the side for another songstress. “This song,” he says before the music starts, “is dedicated to all of you,” meaning the adoring San Francisco crowd, the listener, Martha and Izora. He then begins to circle around the phrase that will form the song’s animating principle: “you are my friend...I’ve been around, I’ve been looking around and you were here all the time.” Sylvester strains in this segment of the song to reach the high notes and the tension in his voice provides the song with its acoustic drama; when his voice thins, in the far corners of the song, it also punches through the potential corniness of the lyric to find a place of palpable emotion. After this opening phrase, Sylvester breaks to turn to the song’s real subject, namely his relationship with Martha and Izora. He lovingly tells of how they met, and of how the two women have stood by him, through everything. Finally, Sylvester invites each woman into the song, into the rhythm and he offers to

share the stage with them: he sings first to Martha: “Martha, you’ve been around” until she picks the lyric up “I’ve been around...and you were there all the time.” Following Martha’s gorgeous solo, Sylvester, tells the audience “we love each other” and then turns to Izora: “Izora, you’ve been around...” When Izora’s voice answers the call, “I’ve been looking, you were here all the time,” the male falsetto finds its female bass complement, as you will hear in a moment.

Izora begins her solo down low; she occupies the regions where we might reasonably have expected to find a male voice but she turns her bass into something much more interesting than a male counterpart to Sylvester’s “unnaturally” high range. Izora goes low so that Sylvester can soar, she grounds his flutey quavers and answers his occasional screech with a growl. She digs deep and finds a guttural response that is more of a low rumbling than a melodious bass. Izora’s growl, tethered as it is to Sylvester’s tuneful screams reminds us of Mackey’s placement of the falsetto in the family of the moan and the shout. All of these sounds go far beyond the word and in this place beyond language they create queer friendship from noise unloosed from the gendered body, melody not bound to harmony. The song’s finale features the three dueling divas pushing in and out of each other’s range and building to a quiet conclusion where Sylvester confirms: “You are my friend.” In the two examples of queer covers and musical genders that I have presented here, LOE and Sylvester play out the noisy theatrics of the cover version. While Sylvester uses his cover of Patti LaBelle to place himself within a sorority of Black female performers, LOE channel a queer past but remake it in the process. While LOE infuse the sincere acoustics of earlier lesbian performers with static and reverb, Sylvester registers the impact of earlier queer femininities and queer masculinities in his quavering falsetto; another queerly gendered legacy lives on in the booming bass with which Izora answers Sylvester’s song to friendship and through the cover version a different model of friendship, history, and art sings its song.

Notes

Judith Halberstam is Professor of English and Director of the Center for Feminist Research at the University of Southern California. Earning degrees in English from the University of California, Berkeley and the University of Minnesota, Halberstam's work has centered on critical theory, popular and film studies, nineteenth-century British literature, and queer theory. Her most recent projects include *The Transgender Moment: Gender Flexibility and the Postmodern Condition* (2004), *The Drag King Book* (1999), and *Female Masculinity* (1998). In addition to her scholarly work, she also teaches courses on film, art, queer studies, gender theory, and literature.

This essay will also appear in the next issue of the journal *Women and Music*, accompanied by a response by Judith Peraino (Cornell). I would like to thank Suzanne Cusick, Editor of *Women and Music*, for her permission to present "Lesbians on Ecstasy" in The Newsletter before it appears in *Women and Music*.

1 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (NY: Routledge, 1990).

2 Personal conversation with the author.

3 Simon Reynolds, "Even As A Child I Felt Like An Alien: A Conversation with Patti Smith," *The Observer*, "Observer Music Monthly," (May 22, 2005).

4 Sarah Liss, "Grrrl on Girl Music: Lesbians on Ecstasy More Than Merely Clever Parody," in *Now Toronto: Online Edition* at www.nowtoronto.com Vol. 23 #6 (Oct. 9-15, 2003).

5 See online journal *Roctober* #19 (1997): <http://www.roctober.com/roctober/greatness/sylvester.html>

6 Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995).

Call for Papers

Queer Masculinities (11/1/07; PCA/ACA, 3/19/08-3/22/08)

2008 Popular Culture/American Culture Associations National Conference

San Francisco Marriott, California March 19-22, 2008

For more information on the PCA/ACA, please go to <http://www.h-net.org/~pcaaca>. The conference website is <http://www.pcaaca.org>

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION DEADLINE UPDATE: NOVEMBER 1, 2007

We are considering proposals for sessions organized around a theme, special panels, and/or individual papers. Sessions are scheduled in 1 hour slots, usually with 4 papers/speakers per session.

We welcome any topics pertaining to the studies of gender, sexuality, and popular culture—regarding heterosexual, gay, bisexual, or transgender men and/or women—and are especially interested in the following subjects:

- literature
- media
- fashion/beauty
- gay men and masculinity
- the queerness of masculinity
- marketing/advertising
- men's roles (under attack? redefinition? etc.)
- internet (including porn, hookup sites)
- intersection/other relation of gender & sexuality
- straight men and gay sex (or sexuality)
- trends in heterosexual male self-image (metrosexual, machosexual, etc.)
- theory

If you or any of your colleagues are interested in submitting a proposal or have questions, please contact the area chair. Submit a one-page (150-250 words) abstract (via e-mail, preferably) by November 1, 2007, to the area chair for Queer Masculinities:

Dr. William C. Harris
Associate Professor of English
Shippensburg University
1871 Old Main Drive
Shippensburg, PA 17257
717-377-1304
wcharr@ship.edu