

A MONOGRAPH

How Popular Songs Enhanced Twentieth-Century Gay Identity, Culture, and Literature

Editor's Note: Jack Fritscher earned his doctorate in literature at Loyola University, Chicago, in 1967, and in 1968 was a founding member of the American Popular Culture Association that introduced diversity into university curricula, insisting that culture might better be studied as it was happening, rather than fifty years later. He is the founding San Francisco editor of *Drummer* magazine.

Coming out from the 1930s Depression into the Second World War, I found boyhood comfort and joy in my own red plastic 78rpm record player. It was a toy and more than a toy. It had a two-inch handle on the center spindle that I had to turn carefully at 78rpm. Although it was a great giggle to turn it at wrong speeds to make funny voices, it was frustrating low-tech made worse by the brittle wartime "78" records spread around me as I sat on the floor, because I was continually putting my little hand back, too often on the platters, which broke way too easily.

I was intuitively aware of how to use song lyrics to communicate. In our living room, especially during air-raid blackouts, the adult men in uniform heading off to war were heroic and handsome to me, especially when they'd pick me up and set me on their knee the way soldiers on a sentimental journey home did to kids back then because we were what they were fighting for. Those men ignited same-sex feelings in me that were not in them. This little boy fantasized every gay boy's magical thinking, which is a synonym for masturbation, that maybe they'd let me

join them in uniform and I'd magically turn into the pretty pet "Bugle Boy of Company B."

As a child, I was getting thrilling masculine chills from "Stout-Hearted Men" which Nelson Eddy sang with a hearty men's chorus on screen in *New Moon* (1940). So I sang along with that hit on wartime radio: "Give me some men who are stouthearted men and I'll soon give you ten thousand more." My intuitive sense of this song of masculine solidarity was confirmed by Barbra Streisand outing this male-bonding song to her gay fans in 1967, two years before Stonewall in her album *Strictly Streisand*.

Secretly, this kid knew how to spin the answer to bandleader Gordon Jenkin's provocative 1942 musical question, "Would You Rather Be a Colonel with an Eagle on Your Shoulder or a Private with a Chicken On Your Knee?" That song with its "Old MacDonald" barnyard images so appealing to a young boy was first popular during the First World War. It was mind-expanding because it was as suggestive as it was surreal. I did not really understand the military codes of rank in it, but I sniffed sex. I knew the "chicken" on the knee, meant a sexy situation for the girl on the soldier's lap, and for the soldier. I wanted what they were having. I went so far as to skip around the living room sing-singing the lyrics "as a joke"—using humor was my way to code a message—to get soldiers to pick me up in their embrace, because they thought it was "cute," and my being cute, outing my cuteness, got me what I wanted from grown men: connection and identity.

War Babies created the post-war gay culture before and after Stonewall. The thrills and anxieties of the Second World War shaped American gay consciousness, gay liberation, and gay hedonism. By 1969, we War Babies, age thirty and under, had rioted at Stonewall. By 1979, we War Babies, age forty and under, had shaped the first decade of gay liberation and the music in bars and discos, and resisted the Vietnam War which did not end until 1975, six years before AIDS. I wrote in my 1972 short story, "Silent Mothers, Silent Sons": "What does anyone remember of the First World War, or the Second? Everyone remembers

the nostalgia of the songs, the movies, the dancing, the styles of clothes and hair.”

Because all these soldiers were only briefly home on leave, I knew that they would soon be gone and might be killed, and the longing “in them” became the longing in me “for them” as I played “Sentimental Journey” on my hand-cranked turntable. That song by Doris Day and Les Brown and His Band of Renown began my lifelong gay identification with Doris Day even before her cross-dressing in *Calamity Jane* in which she sang the song Sappho herself could have composed, “Secret Love.” I found a frisson of gay code also in her famous 1950s lesbian-style duck-tail hairstyle pictured by the Columbia Record Club on the cover of her long-play album *Day by Night*.

In 1948 when I was nine, “Nature Boy” swept little “emerging me” over the rainbow because Eden Ahbez’ lyrics gave me fully realized concepts and words that helped me name and sort pre-teen feelings about how different I secretly knew I was. “Nature Boy” was the first song I knew was about my sexual difference and the reasons for it.

That revelation jumped to bold-italics when my movie-going parents took me to see *The Boy with Green Hair* starring Dean Stockwell who was only three years older than I, and looked a bit like my brother on the silver screen. The theme song was “Nature Boy.” That film about the difficulties of a boy being different gave me almost music-video images to go along with the lyrics.

And Nat King Cole’s hit version of “Nature Boy” readied me for what I have always thought should have been its B-side, his other big hit “Orange Colored Sky” (1950), because its bright incongruous lyrics, pre-dating the psychedelia of the Sixties, introduced me to an audio-surrealism that seemed to fit with the idea that I was not living a life parallel to my parents. I was living a parallax existence of a kind of sexual awareness as fun and illogical and alternative as “Orange Colored Sky” which later became to me a rehearsal for the equally surreal LSD song, “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds.”

By 1950, American pop culture in magazines, radio, and film had become comically aware of Salvador Dali for his strange name and his offbeat look as well as for his surrealism. Even though I

was only eleven, I transcended the jokes about the “queer” Dali and connected his paintings and outrageous grooming with what I felt was the dizzying vertigo of lyrics in “Orange Colored Sky.” Within those literal lyrics, the Catholic altar boy I was sang along with my true gay self translating, gayifying, *transcoding*, those lyrics to my personal experience: “I was hummin’ a tune drinkin’ in sunshine...and...the ceiling fell in and the bottom fell out” while “I was walking along and minding my business” and, *suddenly*, when a love that could not speak its name “hit me in the eye...” Well, “Flash Bam Alakazam,” I was gay!

I began to understand that, in addition to simple melody and lyrics, music had subtext codes I could crack if I had wit enough. It was awesome. I had a huge secret. I possessed the gay magic of a true “invert” able to turn straight songs upside-down gay, and back again, like a rolling “69.”

By the time I turned twelve in 1951, people who would never whisper the word *homosexuality* were all a-twitter that Johnnie Ray, the hugely popular singer famous for his emotional and tear-stained rendition of “Cry,” was queer. He was disabled. He wore a hearing aid. He awakened me to the fact that straight boys my age could be dangerous because, the newspapers wrote, he had been made deaf in one ear by Boy Scouts who injured him in a blanket-toss hazing. He deflated a certain kind of machismo expected of American male singers, and replaced it with something else. I watched him on our first television set, and thought, even as he shed black-and-white tears on screen, I like him, but I don’t want to be like him. He was not like the stoic manly soldiers of my childhood. He was quivering very like the quivering manazon Judy Garland, the ventriloquist of gay code, whom I liked from her MGM musical comedies in which she pined for “The Boy Next Door.” I felt that Johnnie Ray and Judy Garland carried the weight of the gay condition on their shoulders for the rest of us.

“Cry” was a *cri de coeur* kind of torch song, the kind I’d later learn might be best sung by a drag queen leaning into the curve of a grand piano in the Plywood Room, a kind of cautionary tale about the existential heartbreak of outlawed homosexuality. Johnnie Ray was a true pioneer in bringing popular song out of the closet, even though straight reaction to his gay anthem rather

frightened me off effeminacy at the same mid-century moment that Christine Jorgensen and Liberace and Tennessee Williams and Alfred Kinsey were daring to out a diversity of gay faces, voices, and identities in popular culture.

As a gay pioneer, Johnnie Ray soon enough begat his sound-alike Brenda Lee whose equally androgynous voice started her series of gayish “crying” songs with her version of his “Cry” (1961), and then moved on to singing “The Crying Game” (1965) which was fully outed by Boy George (1992), and then exalted as a gay text driving Neil Jordan’s transgender film *The Crying Game* (1992). Ray and Lee paved the way for me to buy records by free-range gender voices, such as Chris Montez and Wayne Newton, singing love songs whose androgynous sound let gays and straights sort out in their own heads if the song was for them or not. For instance, in 1964, my sister, who is eighteen years younger than I, was seven and so fascinated by the sorting of gender that she asked me every time Montez or Newton sang on the radio, “Is that a boy or a girl?”

The best heir, and antidote, to the emotional territory blazed by Johnnie Ray was Johnny Mathis. Popular among romantic straights in the 1950s, he was the third-best-selling singer of the twentieth century. He was a gay man, and a star athlete who, in his “Wonderful, Wonderful” choirboy tenor and falsetto, characteristically sang romantic first-person-narrator songs addressed mostly to a non-gendered “you.” His pre-Stonewall title track from his album *The Sweetheart Tree*, with its cover portrait of Mathis by gay Hollywood film legend Roddy McDowall, coded the virtually italicized promise of true love “if you kiss the *right* sweetheart.”

The word *certain* in the title of Mathis’s hit, “A Certain Smile,” suggested to us gay teens a *certain* kind of love, a *different* kind of love, a gorgeous *transient* love set flaming by the bitter-sweet rituals of cruising: “A fleeting glance can say so many lovely things....You love awhile and when love goes, you try to hide the tears inside with a cheerful pose. But in the hush of night, exactly like a bittersweet refrain comes that *certain* smile to haunt your heart again.” That song had a gay provenance that Mathis himself italicized with innuendo. It was the title song he performed

in the film *A Certain Smile* based on the second novel by teen prodigy Françoise Sagan whose youth and talent mesmerized us gays in the 1950s. Mathis' song introduced Sagan who had jolted us American Beatnik teens to attention with her international bestseller *Bonjour Tristesse* in 1954 when she was eighteen, and I was fifteen. In our precocious closets, we transcoded his songs and her novels of offbeat and illicit love because our gaydar intuitively knew that Sagan was a deftly uncloseted sexual outlaw who was no stranger to sex, drugs, and writing song lyrics. She soon enough came out as a bisexual pal hanging out in queer coteries in Paris, Key West, and points beyond with famously gay icons such as Truman Capote, Tennessee Williams, Carson McCullers, and actor and singer Anthony Perkins who starred as the gayish young lover (for which he won "Best Actor" at Cannes) in *Good-bye Again*, the 1961 film adapted from Sagan's novel *Aimez-vous Brahms*, with its torchy "drag-queen leaning into a baby grand" title song sung on screen by jazz-club diva Diahann Carroll, "Say No More, It's Goodbye."

Between 1953, when I was fourteen, and 1963, I was a student closeted in a Catholic seminary where many boys of that extremely religious post-war decade retreated as a way to temper our sexuality, both straight and gay, with vows of chastity. During the post-war Red Scare in the 1950s that led to the hateful McCarthy House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), the war-weary US turned to popular religion and patriotic songs that were virtual hymns for the onward marching Christian soldiers who would spend the next two decades evolving McCarthy's fundamentalism into their startup of the Moral Majority Culture War with Anita Bryant in the 1970s, and with increasingly perfervid country-western songs into the twenty-first century. The very popular "Hit Parade" song in the nation in 1950 was "Our Lady of Fatima," recorded by Red Foley, the father-in-law of the yet unknown Pat Boone, and then covered by Tony Bennett and many others—with all the pious renditions suffocating teenage me.

As a good seminarian wanting to be a "bad boy," I was polarized between Elvis Presley and Pat Boone the way I was torn between Marilyn Monroe and Grace Kelly. I recognized Elvis's

overt gay lyrics in “Jailhouse Rock” where “Number forty-seven said to number three: ‘You’re the cutest jailbird I ever did see. I sure would be delighted with your company, come on and do the Jailhouse Rock with me.’” Boone’s vanilla gay appeal was so alluring in his “Friendly Persuasion” that a decade earlier he would have been perfect playing Judy Garland’s “Boy Next Door” in *Meet Me in St. Louis*. Both Presley and Boone influenced teen fashion. I owned Elvis’s blue suede shoes as well as Pat’s white bucks. I liked Elvis rocking, but I preferred Pat crooning. I remember reading in *Parade* in 1958 that Pat’s wife, Shirley Foley, asked Bing Crosby when she’d get her husband back from the screaming fans, and Bing said, “In about twenty-five or thirty years.”

Unfortunately both Elvis and Pat got religion, one worse than the other. Nevertheless, I have every Dot record Pat Boone made through 1964, and, even though he later became famously anti-gay, I confess that in my own sixties I went twice to see him “live” in concert where, during the request portion of the show, I asked him to sing his hit movie theme about a woman’s shifting identity, “Anastasia.” (He declined.) For gay men and women, some “good boys” have the same irresistible and forbidden allure as “bad boys.” In 1997, overcome with nostalgia, I outed my teenage crush on my once-favorite singer. When Pat came to San Francisco’s Tower Records to plug his misbegotten album *In a Metal Mood* (1997), I brought my white bucks from 1956, and he and I had a big hug and a warm laugh together as I handed him a black marking pen and he autographed both shoes for me.

In counterpoint to such post-war musical patriotism and fundamentalism, 1950s rock’n’roll rose up rebelling against the WASP American norm with the beat of African-American “race music” and sexuality introducing conservative white gay boys and girls to liberated sex notions whose passions gestated into real solidarity with the 1960s civil rights movement.

Early on, I recognized a basic truth that songs sung by black women singly or in groups tend to lend themselves best to gayification. Their lyrics so often deal forthrightly with “man trouble” that they don’t suffer like the masochistic Garland, and their songs become declarations of independence. Who needs a Greek

chorus commenting on that idea, when “The colored girls go: Doo doo doo doo.” Indeed. Lou Reed.

The priests at the seminary only approved of pop songs that they themselves were adept at coopting into “hymns,” most obviously redemptive tunes from their favorite Broadway shows that they insisted our seminary glee club sing: “You’ll Never Walk Alone,” “Climb Every Mountain,” and “Somewhere (There’s a Place for Us)” which they thought was about a promised heaven and I thought was about a promised gay Eden. Those priests’ alchemy was the same conversion therapy and appropriation trick we gays did three decades later when we turned *Les Misérables* elegiac with its “hymns” for AIDS funerals, “Bring Him Home” and “Empty Chairs at Empty Tables.” The priests forbade us to listen to Lieber-Stoller’s “He Wore Black Denim Trousers and Motorcycle Boots (and a Black Leather Jacket with an Eagle on the Back)” (1955) which I bought as a 45rpm because it seemed a perfect soundtrack for Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*, the 1953 film that outed the post-war leather biker culture of military veterans. It was also the same moment of social evolution when radio, movies, and television were inventing the first ever teenage demographic to sell consumer goods to Baby Boomers turning adolescent.

That juvenile-delinquent hit, “Black Denim Trousers,” was driven to the top of the charts by the simultaneous death of the rebel without a cause, James Dean (September 1955), which, in domino effect, abetted by the death of Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and the Big Bopper (February 1959) led to the genre of teenage tragedy and death songs, such as “Teen Angel” (October 1959). I still have my handwritten gay-teen-angst journals where I dripped my own Johnnie Ray tears on the page copying down the yearning lyrics of “Teen Angel,” with that page pressing, like a souvenir prom corsage, my yellowed newspaper clippings of the Holly plane crash.

That angst was reasonable. Growing up on the bleeding edge of gay history when gay boys and men all around me were being arrested and put in asylums and always had to die in Hollywood movies by accident or murder or suicide, this gay adolescent identified with Shakespearean teen tropes of “forbidden love and death

at an early age.” I found it easy to spin the lyrics gay enough to feel the personal tragedy, and the romantic joy, of the impossible Romeo-Romeo secret love I longed to make possible and public.

So, of course, at age fifteen, I immediately fell in intense “Puppy Love” (Paul Anka) and intense “Young Love” (Tab Hunter) with a “Sweet Little Sixteen” (Chuck Berry) boy in the seminary. “Our song” in 1954 was “Unchained Melody,” the love theme from the prison film *Unchained*. We sneaked off from the seminary cloister/prison to buy the 45rpm recorded by Les Baxter, and smuggled it into the seminary hidden under our shirts, feeling very unchained. We loved that simple little ballad which lost its Oscar nomination to the more surging movie theme, “Love Is a Many Splendored Thing.” As fans of weekly Top Ten Hit lists, we listened with pleasure as our plain-spoken song, with its gender-neutral “Oh, my Love, my Darling,” became more and more popular with covers by black singers like Al Hibbler and Roy Hamilton, and by the rather embarrassing Liberace, before it exploded ten years later into the blue-eyed soul of the Righteous Brothers that was played without irony on jukeboxes in gay bars, and in 1990 became the campy soundtrack for the phallic potter’s wheel scene with the dead Patrick Swayze embracing the living Demi Moore in the fantasy film *Ghost*.

In 1956, big vacuum-tube radios for the first time became small and portable. Transistor radios exploded onto the consumer scene and changed the way we Sputnik teens listened to pop music, especially in the seminary where the tiny plastic radios could be easily hidden inside hollowed-out Bibles. With no access to mass media allowed, we had a rogue classmate from Philadelphia who kept us literally tuned up with Philly Doo Wop. He smuggled in black hits (trending *gay* to me) like the Platters’ confessional “The Great Pretender” and Mickey and Sylvia’s irresistibly alternative “Love Is Strange” (1956) which, because of its thematic keyword *strange*, immediately translated its curious self into a gay song anticipating a veritable litany of pre-Stonewall jukebox standards like Johnny Mathis’ “Stranger in Paradise” (1959), Frank Sinatra’s cruise-y “Strangers in the Night” (1966), and Jim Morrison and The Doors’ overt “People Are Strange.” The Doors album *Strange Days* with its haunted title song evoked the rise of anonymous

sexual masochism in the new, dark, erotic venues of bars, baths, and sex clubs: “Strange eyes fill strange rooms...And through their strange hours we linger alone. Bodies confused, memories misused, as we run from the day to a strange night of stone.” (1967).

When pronouns in lyrics collide with the listener’s preference, no problem. We gay people are born knowing how to gay-ify everything. We have a “simultaneous translation” talent for transcoding, which I define as our cunning ability to switch pronouns and nouns, even as we hear them, from straight to gay, as in James Darren’s almost born gayified, “(Here She Comes) Her Royal Majesty” (1962). You don’t need to be a drag chanteuse at San Francisco’s Finocchio’s, where I saw an elegant show in 1961, to know that in addition to swapping pronouns, gayification of lyrics changes the emotional center of the song, often adding irony and cynicism and perspective and humor that either create something new, or “out” something old, in the song. The fluid Lou Reed celebrated pronoun transcoding in “Walk on the Wild Side” with his iconic Holly Woodlawn line: “...he was a she.”

In the 1960s queer cabaret scene, Zebedy Colt, foreshadowing by years the founding and tactics of the Gay Men’s Chorus, changed pronouns and switched out gender mandates on his LP album, *Let Me Sing for You* (1969), which, with the white marble statue of “David” on its blue album jacket, starred him singing his original gay songs and boldly covering standards originally written for female singers, such as his showstopping “The Man I Love.” He was not your gay Auntie’s Johnnie Ray. He named himself after the homomasculine Colt Studio, and he sang camp-free and man-to-man. His roots are so deep inside the gay canon of pop renditions that his lush big-band orchestration of “The Man I Love” was played under the end credits of the HBO gay television series, *Looking*, Episode 7 (2014).

I also recall that in 1968, an older gent, using the universal gay gambit of getting-to-know-you songs to make small talk, told me at a Chicago cocktail party that he had written “Mister Sandman” in whose sheet music he indicated how to change the pronouns to suit the singer’s gender. Beyond pronouns, he insisted that his original inspirational lyrics were, “Mister Sandman, Bring

me a Queen...” Of course, he was charming. Of course, he was drunk. Of course, he was lying to seduce me, but he illustrated the gay penchant for transcoding lyrics into our camp vernacular. (I wasn’t seduced.) Earlier, in 1960, we closeted gays, without changing a single word, elbowed our way in to sing along, lip-syncing our swelling silent pride with Connie Francis, belting the ultimate 1960s Gay Hymn of Summer, “Where the Boys Are.” By 1984, even homomascuine leathermen in the fetish outposts of butch leather bars were appropriating Willy Nelson singing Hal David’s lyrics: “To all the girls I’ve loved before, if they’d been boys I’d love them more.”

In the tradition of American authors like Tennessee Williams in his plays and John Dos Passos who built popular songs into his *USA Trilogy*, my own writing often quotes song lyrics in text and titles because songs are an international passport to a common mythology—from the simple story of “Peggy Sue” to the complexity of “Bohemian Rhapsody.” Mostly I write in a quiet room where no outside rhythms can impede the rhythms of the writing process. However, in 1990-1994 while writing my memoir, *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*, I found the best way to conjure the 1970s I spent with Robert was through the music of that era, and somehow I found the rhythms of Robert Mapplethorpe in the soundtrack of *The Crying Game* which played on “repeat” to keep my writing rhythm flowing. Sometimes I have created gay erotic stories based on, and titled like, the Eagles’ “New Kid in Town.” Characters can emerge from songs into stories, and into gay art. Gay American modernist Beauford Delaney, having risen within the Harlem Renaissance, listened to Bessie Smith records while painting his 1963 portrait of his friend James Baldwin because Baldwin was black and blue as Bessie.

When I wrote my dissertation on Tennessee Williams in 1967, I made note of the many songs he mentioned or referenced because I grew up consoling myself with all he did. We were in the same key. I used his confessions and revelations to shrink my gay teenage self out to survive. In his scripts that speak so broadly to gay men, he precisely dictated swing music in *The Glass Menagerie*, and music by African-Americans in *Battle of Angels*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and *Camino*

Real. He also wrote poems, he called “blues,” with the idea some kind stranger might set them to music. Tennessee, who could do a wicked Rudy Vallee impersonation, said, songs were often his “epiphanies,” the source of his plots and characters. He told his protégé, James Grissom, that when he was young and suffocating in the closet: “The radio was my first taste of an ‘out there’ that I had to get to....I pray to have the ability to evoke through words what wonderful orchestral music can accomplish—or even tawdry jukebox ditties that...move a person....I can recall times in my life when I would be walking down a street....and from a bar or an open window I might hear the sound of strings and with it a voice that competed with its cry, it teasing wail. It’s a sound that stops me cold, literally. I stand there and I’m transported....That is what I hope the Creative Principle can be.”

Grissom added in his *Follies of God: Tennessee Williams and the Women of the Fog* that when Tenn worked for MGM in Hollywood in 1943, he often spent time at a gay producer’s mansion where “...the house hummed and trilled.’ Records were turned and dropped, and each cut would propel an emotion, a memory from one of the guests....Each time a record fell, Tenn could feel that a word dropped into his mind, then fell upon his mental stage, waiting to be accepted or rejected by whatever woman [character] waited in the wings.” Tenn once said that he found his Amanda Wingfield in a Hollywood mansion during a quiet moment at a wild party surrounded by “music and beautiful men....The album and the ice dropped....and the words and idea dropped. Amanda stands in her environment.” In New Orleans when he was writing *Portrait of a Madonna* which became *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Williams found his iconic Blanche Dubois emerging from his record player which “repeatedly played ‘You Won’t Be Satisfied (Until You Break My Heart)’ by Doris Day and ‘Do I Worry?’ by Tommy Dorsey...” Tenn, who was fascinated by murder houses, was obsessed with the Los Angeles home where the Manson Family killed celebrities who had rented the house from Doris Day’s son, the record producer, Terry Melcher. (Quotations from Grissom, *Follies of God*, pages 21, 56, 61, 66, 72, 73, 81.)

Earning his keep in gay pop culture, the Tennessee Williams scholar David Kaplan compiled songs mentioned in Williams’

plays for Tony Award nominee Alison Fraser's cabaret show, *Tennessee Williams: Words and Music*, performed with the "Gentlemen Callers" including "It's Only a Paper Moon" from *Streetcar*, "You're the Only Star" from *This Property Is Condemned*, "Sweet Leilani" from *Something Cloudy, Something Clear*, Noel Coward's "The Party's Over Now" from *Clothes for a Summer Hotel*.

In my 1999 pop-culture novel, *The Geography of Women: A Lesbian Comedy*, the narrator is a young woman whose accordion-champion father named her Laydia Spain Perrins, after the song "Lady of Spain." In her sexual awakening in this 1950s romantic comedy with music, Laydia romances two other young women, the first one of whom is Jessarose, an African-American blues singer traveling the roadhouse circuit around St. Louis. Laydia listens to popular songs to listen to her feelings. With no other access to sex education, she trusts she'll find hidden messages to sort her same-sex feelings. She voices the frustration and mystery of bending straight love songs with same-sex pronouns.

I didn't have any hoo-ha notion a how many people there was that night, but I knew as sure as the radio on that hot summer porch was playin my favorite song, "Moonglow and the Theme from Picnic," with Mizz Kim Novak, who I idolized, that I was gonna find out an try em all on for size that I figgered might fit, cuz if my thigh-feelin ran true to my heart, I knew I was gettin warm an only had to touch the girl or the woman or the lady, who, like Mizz Doris Day with her Calamity Jane hair style, sang "Once I Had a Secret Love," an triggered my own very secret-love feelin to flare up, to find out what I was like, sorta like other women was the mirror a me, or the opposite a me, or, I'm sorry, I can't explain it better, cuz most all the songs I ever heard that put easy words in my mouth about love an stuff are high-school prom songs about girls an boys touchin each other, never girls touchin an kissin girls, an why, with all the new girl groups singin, is that? I thought that up myself. Like I was born knowin it. Like I invented it.

Thwarted in love, Laydia reveals a bitter insight into how she found lesbian promise in straight music she tried to bend to her own feelings.

My heart, achin for my Daddy gone forever, threw proportion on my heartache for Jessarose who was only gone in time an space an by her choice, no doubt travelin on the road singin in some girl group a three singers, writin ou-ou-baby lyrics about girls dyin for motorcycle boys in leather jackets, deliverin tight harmonies in tighter dresses to a piano back beat a rock 'n' roll. That vision a Jessarose herself sent bitter tears down my face an just added ou-ou-baby fuel to the torch I was carryin.

When I exited my eleven- year hitch in the seminary three weeks after the Kennedy assassination in 1963, I walked out into a sad world whistling Gene Pitney's cautionary hit about bullying, "Town without Pity." In January 1964, along with the arrival of the Beatles delivering us from our national sorrow, I exploded into Chicago in leather bars like the Gold Coast, and into book stores that sold, as a gay novelty joke, an empty album cover with no record inside, created by High In-Fidelity Records and titled *Music for Mixed Emotions* (1962). I bought it because the same-sex cover photograph was of two men, one in a suit, one in loafers and slacks, shot from the waist down, belt buckle to belt buckle, with one loafered foot kicked sole-up behind the knee, satirizing the movie-poster cliché of a swooning girl stretching up on tiptoe to kiss her man.

I also ran to the Chicago premiere of Kenneth Anger's new film, *Scorpio Rising*, which was the gay version of *The Wild One*. Anger's surreal montage of Catholicism and homosexuality fit me like a glove fetish, especially mixed with images of James Dean, Marlon Brando, Jesus, leather bikers, and those nasty Nazis that had scared me during World War II. Anger's copyright-defying soundtrack immediately identified the kind of 1950s songs we gay boys were transcoding from *straight* to *gay*. His playlist for that pioneer music-video film, which every gay person should watch,

also reflects the kind of jukebox tunes that gay bars played every night up to and beyond Stonewall in 1969.

Anger's carefully vetted Gay Hit List deserves individual mention for his genius at gayification: Ricky Nelson, "Fools Rush In"; Little Peggy March, "Wind-Up Doll"; The Angels, "My Boyfriend's Back"; Bobby Vinton, "Blue Velvet"; Elvis Presley, "(You're the) Devil in Disguise"; Ray Charles, "Hit the Road, Jack"; Martha and the Vandellas, "(Love Is Like a) Heat Wave"; The Crystals, "He's a Rebel"; Claudine Clark, "Party Lights"; Kris Jensen, "Torture"; Gene McDaniels, "Point of No Return"; Little Peggy March, "I Will Follow Him"; and the Surfaris, "Wipe Out." This underground cinema was definitely not like the campy gay candy of Bing Crosby and Danny Kaye in drag singing "Sisters" in the Hollywood film *White Christmas* (1954).

As an historian also penning fiction in novels and magazine short stories, I have always actively invoked the magic powers of popular songs as an incantatory shorthand to nail, or enhance, the emotions of plot psychology and characterization, and to help arouse feelings in the reader I am trying in my erotica to bring to orgasm. I chose the title for one of my books from the hard-edged irony and poetry of the Eagles' *Hotel California* because, I can swear as an eyewitness, every cut on that Los Angeles rock album perfectly described gay life on Castro Street and Folsom Street as those tunes played on tape decks every night in the bars and baths. The Eagles were the most popular group in late 1970s American culture as I was writing my book whose Eagles-sourced title is *Some Dance to Remember: A Memoir-Novel of San Francisco 1970-1982*, my novel of sex, drugs, and rock'n'roll.

In terms of style, intent, and influence in the Titanic 1970s, before our innocent and unsuspecting first-class party crashed into the iceberg of HIV, the Eagles were the soundtrack of *Drummer* magazine which I edited from 1977 to 1980. From "Hotel California" to "New Kid in Town" to "Life in the Fast Lane" to "Desperado" to "Victim of Love" and all the songs in between, the Eagles' songs expressed the exact emotions of *Drummer*. In fact, when one is reading the *Drummer* novel, *Some Dance to Remember*, the Eagles' album, *Hotel California*, might be played

full blast both as mood-setting overture and as *entre act* break between chapters.

Summing up this musical tactic of my literary shorthand, *Playguy* magazine observed in review: “*Some Dance to Remember* is all orchestrated behind recurrent flourishes of lyrics from popular love songs from the Seventies.” (April/May 1990.) Reviewer Tom Phillips noted in the gay newspaper, *We The People*: “The central characters dance in and out of the nonstop flow of sex, drugs, and good dance music, weaving a colorful fabric of persona and passion.” (July 1990)

To further mine the Eagles’ rich subtext, the first chapter is titled “Welcome to the Hotel California.”

The second chapter, “Send in the Clones,” tweaks Stephen Sondheim and opens with the female character Kweenie singing at Fanny’s bar and restaurant on Castro where, siphoning Bette Midler siphoning Mae West, she changes the lyrics of Irving Berlin’s 1920 song, “(I’ll See You in) C-U-B-A,” turning “Cuba” as a choice destination into “Castro” the chosen destination of thousands of gay sex refugees fleeing the culture wars in mid-America. Kweenie is the magical Oracle channeling gay male voices out loud:

Music up. Vamp. Step. Step. Step. “Castro! That’s where I’m goin’.” Bump. Bump. “Castro! That’s where I’ll play.” Slow grind . “Castro.” Hula Hands. “Where hot lips’re blowin’.” Bump. Grind. “Castro! Where nights are...” Left bump. Right bump. Heavy grind. “...gay!” Shake Midler tits. Bump. Grind. Bump. “Castro!” Go down on mike. Play Carmen. Flutter. Whisper. “Where all those handsome gay boys...” Stop. Breathy Mae West double-entendre intonation . “...wind their playboys’ windup toys!” Belt. “Castro!” Dirty bump. Dirty grind. Then NYNY-Liza strut, strut, strut. Shout. “Divine decadence, darlings!” Big Minnelli finish. “I’ll see youuuu..i n C-A-S-T-R-O !”

Because of the “found aura” of gay connotation around songs pertinent to same-sex romance, two other of the six chapters take

their titles from songs, or puns on songs: Chapter 3's "I Know I'll Never Love This Way Again"; and the last, Chapter 6's "Goodbye, Dear, and A-Men" from Cole Porter's "It Was Just One of Those Things."

In Chapter 2, "Send in the Clones," Kweenie opens the scene transcoding Kander and Ebb via the Queen of the Gayifiers, Liza Minnelli:

Clarinet intro. Then bass and soft piano. "Maybe next time, I'll be Kander." Kweenie parodied the blues, doing Liza doing Judy. "Maybe next time, he'll be Ebb." In the baby pinpoint spot, she was all bowler hat, big eye-lashes, red lipstick, and spit curls pasted on each cheek. "Maybe next time for the best time..." Her red-sequined Judy-jacket reflected darts of spotlight around the supper club. "...he'll be totally gay." She blew a kiss to her drummer brushing her beat. "He will do me? Fast! I'll be homo? At last!" Outing her lust for gay men, she teased the lyrics. "Not a 'lady' anymore like the last hag and the hag before." She picked up the chorus. "Everybody loves a lover." She expanded. "So everybody loves me." Her green fingernails clawed the air above her head. "Lady Castro. Lady Folsom. Take a big look at me!" She hit all the right poses to make them love her. "When all you boys are in my corner, I'll blow you all away!" Channeling Judy's invincible voice, she became Liza the Conqueror. "Call me Kweenie! Call me Kweenie!" She thrust jazz hands up framing her face. As the audience rose to their feet, she exploded. "Maybe next time, maybe next time, you'll love me!"

In Chapter 4, "Trouble in Paradise," the oracular Kweenie has another opening of another show in another gay San Francisco bolthole, limning her way as Marlene Dietrich through the Kinks' 1970 hit about an ambiguous transperson, "Lola," who "walked like a woman and talked like a man."

A Night in the Entropics! Kweenie was appearing in the “New Review 1980” at the Mabuhay Gardens on Broadway near Polkstrasse. “Zola! Z-O-L-A. Emile Zola. Girls will be boys and boys will be toys.” She tipped the top hat crowning her Dietrich tuxedo drag. “Marlene was a man...and so was Zola. Z-O-L-A. Zola.” She was triumphant returning from Hollywood after a small part January Guggenheim had cadged for her in Allan Carr’s ill-fated *Can’t Stop the Music*.

In Chapter 5, “Blind Parents Raise Invisible Child,” Kweenie channels Bette Midler talk-singing over the music in both *The Rose*, and in “The Wind Beneath My Wings.” Reviewer David Van Leer, author of *The Queening of America*, wrote: “Fritscher takes several of Whitman’s lyrics and turns them into pop-song lyrics representing man-to-man bromance in the 1970s.” He was referring to an original song I created for Kweenie out of words written by America’s first gay lyricist, Walt Whitman, in his *Song of Myself*. In acting out the lyrics, Kweenie keens for her brother, Ryan, and his handsome lover, Kick, who sit in front of her, at a table, close together in the crowd at Fannie’s. The passage builds to a punch line that reveals how music and lyrics power our human emotions and overpower our gay emotions.

“Never parting the parting of dear friends.” She moved to the edge of the stage. “Ascending to the atmosphere of lovers.” Her voice rose, glorious, engaging the lyric with true emotion. “Whoever you are....” She loved the ambiguity. “Whoever you are....” She was singing as much to the brother she idealized as she was singing for him to Kick, whom she loved, and for Kick to Ryan. “...holding me now in hand, carry me...” A heartfelt passion came into her husky voice. “...when you fly up over land and sea.” A silence washed across the room. “We two boys together cling.” Waiters stopped at their stations. Dessert spoons rested on plates. Kweenie could not hold back real tears. “Touching you would I sleep. Not touching you would I die.” She thought of herself, and what Ryan

had made her to be. She thought of the successes Kick always said were Ryan's too. "Carried away eternally." Something deep within her feared for her brother's very life. She saw Ryan's hand resting on the white tablecloth. "Whoever you are holding me now in hand..." She saw Kick catch her drift. He took Ryan's fingers into his own. "Whoever you are holding me now in hand, carry me, in your arms tightly pressed, into the splendor of night." Kick became the splendor. He became a god, rising up on Kweenie's voice, sailing over the heads at the tables, soaring up through the dissolving ceiling, flying through the opening roof toward the moonlit night, defying gravity, defying space, circling ever upward magnificently, almost asleep on the wind, with Ryan, himself light as thin air, following, rising in updraft, invisible almost, lovely as a rising wisp of cloud riding ever upward beneath the moon. Kweenie held the house in the palm of her hand. Noel Coward once said, and he included songs as wry as his own, "It's extraordinary how potent cheap music can be."

In Chapter 3, "I Know I'll Never Love This Way Again," I included fictitiously the real-life Robert Opel who famously streaked the 1974 Academy Awards, and in 1978 opened Fey-Way, the first gay art gallery in San Francisco, introducing work by Robert Mapplethorpe, Rex, and Tom of Finland. In the way that Mapplethorpe had Patti Smith as muse, Opel had singer Camille O'Grady, the punk-rock poet who said she opened at CBGB before Patti. In 1979, I profiled her: "Camille O'Grady is a lady. And the lady is a tramp. That's hot." In fact, Wally Wallace, the legendary manager of the legendary Mineshaft in Manhattan, not only let Camille in to have sex at the Mineshaft, he named her the "Official Singer of the Mineshaft," and booked her for the Mineshaft's first anniversary party, November 9, 1977: "Camille O'Grady in Concert."

She was a pioneer poet-singer performing "live" in that deep den of deeper iniquity where the nightly reel-to-reel music tapes were mixed by the quartet of my two playmates, Jerry Rice and

Michael Fesco, paired with Ashland and Wally Wallace. In my video interview on March 28, 1995, Wallace said:

“People talk about the sex at the Mineshaft, but sex was not what it was all about. First of all, I had a policy that the music was never so loud that you couldn’t hear the person next to you. I made the tapes myself. We played anything in the world, from western to classics. A lot of classics actually. At the beginning, it was electronic variations on classic themes. Ella Fitzgerald. Jazz. We tried to avoid basic disco, references to females, references to ‘let’s dance,’ things like that. But the music became kind of famous because we didn’t follow the mainstream. We had a somewhat older clientele.”

What Wallace and partners featured, I remember from my literally hundreds of nights at the Mineshaft, was an energizing sex-blend of classical music, jazz, energetic beats, and S&M themed lyrics, with a special favorite: Tim Buckley’s “Sweet Surrender” which was more seductive than poppers for fisting. As homage to Buckley’s musical power, in *Some Dance to Remember*, I absorbed his lyrics into the incantory rhythm of the prose in Chapter 1: “With Teddy, at the beginning, when he was so young and tender, I thought I had surrendered, in sweet, sweet surrender to love.”

Widening Buckley’s influence to include the legendary Barracks bath in San Francisco, I wrote in Chapter 2: “The Barracks excelled at fuck-music. Over its loudspeakers, Chuck Mangione lifted everyone to the ‘Land of Make Believe,’ and singer Tim Buckley, who too soon died of an overdose in an El Lay elevator, wailed ‘Sweet Surrender.’”

Having frequented hundreds of gay bath houses a thousand times over the years, including the Continental bath ruining its authentic sex vibe with Bette Midler and Barry Manilow performing like noisy neighbors next door, I recall that the legendary Everard Baths at the easily remembered address, 28 West 28th Street, in Manhattan was so ancient (1888-1986) in its quiet whispering sex traditions, and so crowded, that it was the only

bath that did not even bother to play music, probably because it was thought of as a straight bath where finely focused gay men came for the authentic hunt and not for the music.

Finally, in Chapter 5, there is the line: "I want to give myself up to him in sweet, sweet surrender." In cross pollination, our gay pop culture gave as good as we got. The way the fertile soil of the Mineshaft bar's style of leathersex inspired director William Friedkin for his film *Cruising*, the Mineshaft dress code and actual fetish kit inspired Jacques Morali's costume-creation of the four all-American homomasculine archetypes of the Village People, one of whom Morali discovered dancing at the Anvil bar near the Mineshaft in the Meatpacking District.

When Wallace invited Camille O'Grady to sing at the Mineshaft's second anniversary party in 1978, she belted out her popular piss song, "Toilet Kiss." She wrote all of her songs from a gay man's point of view. She often dressed and passed as a leatherman she called "Jack" who was convincing enough to win a bar contest as the hottest leatherman on stage at the Ambush bar in San Francisco. Camille had assembled her own New York band dubbed "Leather Secrets" who were a prototype of punk and new wave. Camille told me on audiotape that she played at Hilly Kristal's CBGB "before Patti." Her flyer announcing her appearance at Max's Kansas City, October 9, 1977, sported a drawing of her with a bullet-snifter of poppers or cocaine up one nostril. Her temporary tattoos read "Wounded Not Broken" and "Stigmata Hari Bleeds for You." She had messed around hanging on the wild side singing with Lou Reed. Lou called Jackie Curtis "James Dean for a day," and he called Camille "Patti Smith without a social conscience." That whole Warhol Factory superstar scene, and *Interview* magazine crowd, welcomed Camille's creation of her own wild twin, "Stigmata Hari." In my 1979 interview, she told me:

The first band I played in was at St. Mark's Church, Folk City. We were pre-punk. Because we wore leather jackets, they billed us as a fifties revival group. I'm not punk. Punk is done by kids. I try to take a point of view of someone who knows something instead of all that

posturing kind of shit. I played at the Bottom Line, and also at the Mineshaft.

Then tragedy struck. The July 1979 night when Opel was shot to death inside Fey-Way, the gunman spared O'Grady. That horror ended the gallery, but not the legend of Fey-Way whose allure and mystique on its opening night in February 1978 I dramatized, partly by referencing Judy Garland as avatar uniting gay people around the gay national anthem. Inside Fey-Way, the gay *creme* of San Francisco mixed and mingled:

The stereo speakers in the gallery moved into the violin pickup of "Over the Rainbow." Something immediately expanded in the room. A quick silence. A short burst of laughter. The conversation resumed. For an instant, everyone in the gallery had perked up like a patriot recognizing the gay national anthem. Opel whispered over my shoulder. "Did you catch that?" he asked. "Come over here with me, please." "Catch what?" "That moment of silent homage to Judy? Ah, Judy! Judy! Judy! What Marilyn is to the silver screen and the silkscreen, Judy is to our ears."

Catching that punk wave in my short fiction, I wrote a *sex-noir* story reflecting how comparatively different from a tame gay bar it was to gay-cruise the hard-boiled punk-rock scene I witnessed inside CBGB where, like the Mineshaft, Robert Mapplethorpe cruised for interesting models. As a preservationist of gay history, I recreated that sex-and-music scene with imagined punk singers and original lyrics in my short story, "CBGB 1977: Hunting the Wild Mapplethorpe Model."

The music was too loud to make normal conversation. On stage, Pontius and Pilate, the leaders of SMEGMA4SKINZ, were laying out their opening number. Pontius Smegma wore a blue ski jacket and stretch pants. He stood stage-rear moving his hands without any particular effect up and down on a synthesizer. He made elevator Muzak sound like the Pachelbel "Canon in D."

Pilate Smegma's leather jacket was torn to shreds. How the fuck can anyone tear up a leather jacket? His black Korvette's \$1.98 wig slipped to his stencilled eyebrows as he struggled to look EVIL. "Sixty-nine Cumshots!" Pilate Smegma shouted, then hit himself in the side of the face with the microphone torn from its stand. POW! "Sixty-nine Cumshots! SIXTY-NINE CUMSHOTS!" He screamed. Then POW! POW! POW! Slamming himself in the side of the face. "WHAT'S YOUR NAME?" I yelled into Mr. Gaulois's ear.

At the height of the AIDS suffering and dying in 1987 to salute caregivers, I purposed an encouraging title on my anthology of erotic stories by invoking one of the many country-western songs that somehow turn gay very quickly: *Stand By Your Man and Other Stories*, Gay Sunshine Press. One of those stories was titled exactly like the Eagles' "New Kid in Town," and a second, "How Buddy Left Me," detailed the rise of San Francisco punk with its characters Buddy and Baby.

Baby was a two-bit, post-nuclear Iago armed with a can of spray paint and a gun. Baby's favorite song was Johnny Cash singing: "I shot a man in Reno just to watch him die."

I based my 1999 musically-infused story "Chasing Danny Boy," from the anthology *Chasing Danny Boy: Powerful Tales of Celtic Eros*, on lyrics by Frederic Weatherly for the sheer joy of outing, reconfiguring, and making gay claim to the male-centered love lyrics of "Danny Boy." I ginned up a fictitious Irish hard-metal band of four queer-ish millennial lads named for the mythic warriors of the Tuatha de Danaan of ancient Irish lore. Their mentor was a transperson I dubbed with the Irish surname "Sheehy" aka "She-He." So, whether Danny boy, or Danny girl, a person can self-declare identity.

I also cast pop songs as characters interacting with human characters in my time-capsule story "Stonewall, June 28, 1969, 11 PM," making the jukebox "speak like a ventriloquist" comically or dramatically as the characters push jukebox buttons "E-11" or

“G-5” to express their thoughts, using song lyrics to talk to each other.

Jukeboxes once had the social purpose of allowing the patrons to choose what music to cruise by. When the Mafia replaced gay-bar jukeboxes with taped music in the 1970s, personal choice was replaced by payola pushing what the music industry wanted the new gay demographic to make popular for the straight hit parade. Before Stonewall, jukeboxes created the mood inside the bar, and gave reason for stand-and-model customers to mix and mingle.

In 1968, I walked into a gay bar in full leather in Gaslight Square in St. Louis, bought a beer, and strolled to the back to stand in the sexy glow of the jukebox because sooner or later the *lingua franca* of the jukebox gives anyone and everyone a terrific excuse to talk to bystanders. It was only ten o'clock or so, early in the evening, hardly anyone there, when a guy in torn Levi's, after a bit of eye contact, came walking back, keeping his eyes low on the jukebox buttons near my Levi's buttons. He dropped his quarter, pressed a number, turned and walked up to me, winked, and returned to his bar stool. Immediately, on dropped the song, “Hello, I Love You (Won't You Tell Me Your Name?)” Cute. Very cute. Even cuter: I walked to the jukebox, pushed a button, and answered his musical question with “Master Jack (It's a Strange World We Live in, Master Jack.)”

To be historically accurate in my “Stonewall” story, I chose songs that by 1969 were the warp and woof of the gay song canon that could have been, would have been, and were in fact on the Stonewall jukebox playlist in the way they were typical in gay bars nationwide. Several of the dozen songs I mentioned by title or quote were Judy Garland standards because her death and her wake just a few days earlier had mythically encouraged the spirit of rebellion. Every story needs a ticking clock, whether for a bomb or a wedding, and I used the minute or two of each recorded side played in the real time inside the story as both a literal and emotional countdown device.

Garland's songs, mixed with the other tracks, guided the dramatic structure of that “sixty-minute story” recounting the last hour of gay pre-history in the Stonewall Inn before the NYPD raid changed everything.

The Garland songs were “Over the Rainbow,” “The Man That Got Away,” “Rock-a-bye Your Baby,” “Dixie,” “Swanee,” “For Me and My Gal,” and “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas,” along with two songs from the pre-Liza original Broadway production of *Cabaret*: “Mein Herr,” trans-quoted as “The ‘cuntinent’ of Europe is so wide, Mein Herr. Not only up and down but side by side, Mein Herr.” This kind of gay punning led to this gloss of the title song, “Cabaret” by my main character, Norma Dessum: ““Judy is exactly that song about Elsie in Chelsea, the happiest corpse I’ve ever seen.”

Other gayified songs included were Betty Everett’s “You’re No Good”; The Doors’ “Hello, I Love You (Won’t You Tell Me Your Name?)”; Stan Getz and Joao Gilberto’s “Girl from Ipanema” sung by Astrud Gilberto; Sly and the Family Stone’s “Hot Fun in the Summertime”; Frank Sinatra’s “Fly Me to the Moon”; Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein’s “Honey Bun”; Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim’s mocking song about resisting the NYPD that could have been sung ironically during the face-off at Stonewall, “Gee, Officer Krupke”; and Creedence Clearwater’s “Proud Mary” and “Susie Q.” The drag queen Norma Dessum, whose name is a double pun on “Nessum Dorma” and “Norma Desmond,” appears armed to the teeth, vocalizing with camp lyrics inside the musicalized story that mentions performances by the theatrical drags Hibiscus and the Cockettes. For example:

Interior Shot inside the Stonewall Inn, 11:15 PM: Inside the whirling Wurlitzer jukebox, the needle scratches into “Town without Pity.” Norma is cadging drinks. “For ten dollars, I’ll count down the Gay Hit Parade. ‘Secret Love,’ ‘Secretly,’ ‘Strangers in the Night,’ anything from Cole Porter, everything from Noel Coward—all capped by the be-wigged, be-jeweled, be-gowned Diana Ross bullying the be-dragged Supremes into ‘I’m Gonna Make You Love Me.’ She can’t threaten me that way. But *you* can!”

Writing the history of that night fictively, I included the two divine androgynes, Robert Mapplethorpe and Patti Smith, as male and female “twins” known as the “Pratt Brats,” two characters in

search of an identity with a Polaroid camera. This invention was a tender homage to my three-year love affair with Robert Maplethorpe who, early in our relationship, showed me his original Frank Sinatra-infused portrait of Patti he had shot for her album *Horses* as well as footage of his film *Moving* starring Patti, saying, “Patti’s a genius.” Robert’s esthetic mentor and rich benefactor. Sam Wagstaff, funded Robert’s photography and produced the Patti Smith Group’s first single, “Hey Joe / Piss Factory.”

Robert, one night, in despair, told me how hard it was to start his career. He said, “Have you ever gone to Max’s Kansas City?” I said, “Yes, of course. I’m the editor of *Drummer*.” He said, “Have you ever *had* to go to Max’s Kansas City?” He meant to see and be seen at that glam rock boite where Andy Warhol’s Velvet Underground and David Bowie and Tim Buckley played. For historical accuracy, I could not resist including his way-too-privileged line as cool characterization of both him and the music venue in the story.

When Robert wanted his first magazine cover, he introduced himself and his portfolio to me in San Francisco in 1977 when he flew to my desk at *Drummer* where I was editor-in-chief. I was always searching for new talent to fill *Drummer* just as I was always collecting ephemera for “filler” reflecting our gay pop culture, such as, “Max’s Kansas City Cocktail Menu” from 1976.

“Try a Max’s Kansas City New York Rock Drink!” Reflecting camp consciousness, each of the fifteen drinks was named for a punk rock star. All the cocktails cost \$2.50, except for the “Patti Smith” which was \$20 for “Champagne [one bottle] and Stout—It’s Been Making Poets Horny for Years,” and “Suicide,” \$3, billed as “Green Chartreuse and 151 Proof Rum on Fire—Attempt Only at the Bar.” The other drinks were: “Blondie: A Silky Smooth Bombshell with Galliano, Cacao, and a Good Head”; Cherry Vanilla, The Dolls, The Fast, The Heartbreakers, John Collins, Joe Cool, Just Water, Marbles, Milk ‘n Cookies, Mink Deville, The Ramones, Tuff Darts, Wayne County Punch.

The story “Stonewall” builds up to the flash-bang entrance of the NYPD rushing into the Stonewall. Popular music is the musical score of gay rebellion and culture. Back in the day, the jukebox was our archive inside the sanctuary of the gay bar. So

it made symbolic sense to me to have the Stonewall patrons first react to the NYPD attack by retreating back to seek sanctuary around the jukebox with its archival songs and its identity texts, in order to defend this gay Arc of the Covenant, and to pump themselves up with all the driving energy offered by its rock'n'roll and its rhythm and blues.

I scored the whole final melee inside the Stonewall with the pounding country-rock rhythms of Creedence's "Susie Q." Precisely because of that provocative "Q" and "A Boy Named Sue." Just as the story begins with the character "M. Iago" singing along with Judy on the jukebox belting "The Man That Got Away," the denouement ends as the Keystone Cops run in and the patrons lock arms around the jukebox blasting "Oh, Susie Q!" like a war chant.

Iago (flashing back on the Democratic Convention) chants "The whole world is watching," and hustles up a scrum, "C'mon, girls," who lock arms around the Wurlitzer. Iago tosses Sylvia a red-silk purse full of dimes that Sylvia feeds into the jukebox, punching, A-12, A-12, A-12, over and over. Iago yells at the blond leather hippie in the (red) stiletto heels, "I like the way you walk. I like the way you talk." The crowd around Iago shouts back, "Susie Q!" "What a blast!" There's two great things: to fuck and fight. "Susie Q! Susie Q! Susie Q!" The uniformed cop charges the jukebox kick-line like a football fullback, knocking down four chorines and the leather hippie, and grabbing Sylvia's wrist, squeezing the dimes out of her hand. "You fucking cunt," he says. "You," he yells at Dwarf, "unplug that thing." Dwarf flips him the finger.

In the Seventies, when I was founding San Francisco editor-in-chief of the international *Drummer* magazine, I hired Skip Navarette to startup a music review column. In his first essay, he tub-thumped the Japanese rock group Benzaiten as excellent "fuck music." In *Drummer* #9, October 1976, Robert Opel, who had famously streaked the 1974 live Academy Awards, shot the

cover photo of drag performer “Gloria Hole” of the Los Angeles drag troupe, the Cycle Sluts, and wrote his cover interview with Sluts emcee “Mother Goddam”: “*Drummer* Spends an Evening with the Cycle Sluts.” The masculine-identified subscribers of *Drummer* freaked out with an avalanche of letters reviling that genderfuck cover.

The Los Angeles Cycle Sluts were similar to the San Francisco musical group, the Cockettes. Both were impervious to shaming. Dragged up as ten fully recognizable bearded males in S&M leather and big wigs, the Cycle Sluts were a cabaret act created in Los Angeles by the New York “Artists Entertainment Complex” that also managed singers Bette Midler and Jack Jones. The Cycle Sluts were developed and trained by AEC in the same boy-band way that Jacques Morali assembled the Village People as reported in *Drummer* #29 (May 1979). They named themselves from a Barbra Streisand line in *The Owl and the Pussycat*, but they owed their biggest debt to the Broadway hit *Rocky Horror Show* which is ironically the trans-musical mentioned most often in the homomale leather world of 1970s *Drummer* because it did a reverse spin fulfilling *Drummer*’s own transformative promise to its readers in the sarcastic song, “(In Just Seven Days) I Can Make You a Man.”

The boys in the Cycle Sluts band mounted their song-and-dance productions at venues from their first gig at the Roxy on Sunset Strip to the mansion of musical-film producer Allan Carr (July 4, 1974), to the Whiskey A-Go-Go in Los Angeles (accompanied by pianist-composer Bill Mays), and at the Broadway in Kilburn, London (April 14, 1976). The master of ceremonies for the Cycle Sluts, Mother Goddam, told Opel in *Drummer*: “The British have a very conservative sense of humor, and the show is so American that it aches. When we got to London, we altered our material....we inserted British colloquialisms...They didn’t like that. They came to see an American show, and they felt we were condescendingly changing the act....So we gave them 100% American....They didn’t get it....The reverse was true in Australia where our two weeks’ show was extended to nine.” Mother Goddam was played by Mikal Bales who became my dear friend whose photography I featured several times in *Drummer* after he

had re-branded himself as “Daddy Zeus” and began his cash-cow Zeus Video Studio whipping and torturing the nipples of muscular young men in bondage.

Bales was also a casual acquaintance and fan of John “Smokey” Condon, an early playmate of John Waters, whose gay Los Angeles band, Smokey, released an extended disco version of its song “Piss Slave” on its “S&M Records” label with its logo of a leatherman biceps. The Cycle Sluts themselves, along with the Cockettes featuring San Francisco’s canonical Sylvester (“You Make Me Feel Mighty Real”) James in that first decade after Stonewall, inspired the genderfuck dress codes of other ascending rockers and punks, as well as the male-impersonation “drag archetypes” of the Village People riding the white elephant of Alan Carr’s disco-disaster film, *Can’t Stop the Music*.

Drummer helped create the very leather culture it reported on. And *Drummer* helped pioneer “leather disco” at San Francisco venues like Trocadero Transfer, and the Kabuki Center, as well as at Seaman’s Hall with huge sex parties such as the CMC Carnival (California Motor Club) which in 1984 evolved into the Folsom Street Fair anchored by the annual “Mr. Drummer” contest which, live on stage, weighed out Two Tons of Fun aka the Weather Girls singing “It’s Raining Men,” a song they introduced at Oasis, a Folsom Street club in a building owned by the publisher of *Drummer*. In *Drummer* 41, we printed a full-page ad for our “*Drummer* Trucker Party” at Trocadero Transfer, 520 Fourth Street, Friday, November 7, 1980, 9 PM to Dawn!” It kicked off the CMC Carnival weekend and was billed: “The men, the food, the music will be topnotch. With a Big \$100 Flight Package from LA to San Francisco.”

Earlier, to chronicle emerging disco-driven gay events in San Francisco, I wrote a review, “*Night Flight* 1977,” for the party produced by filmmaker Wakefield Poole, in *Drummer* #20 (January 1978).

Before there was the White Party and the Black Party and the gay circuit parties, there was *Night Flight*... *Night Flight* was pure Warhol via Poole, and very much based in Andy’s historic *Exploding Plastic Inevitable*

tour-and-happening with Lou Reed, Gerard Malanga, Nico, and the Velvet Underground singing one of S&M's Greatest Hits, "Venus in Furs": "Shiny boots of leather... whiplash girl child....Taste the whip, in love not given lightly." For the subsequent art-sex-disco party, *Stars* (1978), it was cool that producer Michael Malletta projected my 35mm transparencies and Super-8 films over the heads of thousands of revelers and onto white panels from Christo's famous "Running Fence" (1976) that so recently had famously been stretched for twenty-five miles over the coastal hills of Marin County north of the Golden Gate Bridge. No one then had a clue that the white fabric panels on which were projected our gay faces were a ghostly foreshadowing of the panels of the AIDS quilt. http://www.jackfritscher.com/PDF/Drummer/Vol%201/43_NightFlight_Mar2008_PWeb.pdf

In the culture of sadomasochism, exactly as in the culture of bodybuilding, *Drummer* readers were mostly interested in "music to pose by" in S&M (Stand & Model) leather bars and dungeons, or on stage. In physique contests in the 1970s, many musclemen synchronized their posing routines, often too many the same night to the same songs, to tunes like the irresistible exhibitionist fanfare of "Thus Spake Zarathustra" from *2001: A Space Odyssey* and the melodramatic "Theme from *Exodus*" (lyrics by Pat Boone) to a favorite among gay bodybuilders, John Williams' 1979 "Main Theme from *Superman*," which my pal, the *Drummer* and Zeus bondage model, Steve Darrow aka Cord Brigs, posed to the night he won the straight physique title of "Mr. San Francisco 1981."

If homosexuals are presumed to have better taste than straights, then how to explain gay muscle-sex films of the gorgeous kind like those shot by Jim French for his Colt Studio that erase the original real sound of the action with a needle-drop of generic music only a dentist could love. Leather tops, tricking out their dungeons with sound, created or bought reel-to-reel fuck-music tapes often designed by other gay men with Mafia connections to the music business, and designed to enhance the sensuality and mutuality of S&M: Benzaiten, Kraftwerk, Tim Buckley,

and dramatic instrumental film scores. In 1990, *Drummer* #150 featured an essay, "Dykes for Madonna." I was told that Madonna herself was a fan of *Drummer* when, in 1988, one of her "people" telephoned me about booking the *Drummer* muscle model, Dave Gold, for the upcoming music video, "Express Yourself."

Finally, in 1978 I shot the handsome cabaret pianist John Trowbridge for the cover of *Drummer* #21 (March 1978), which was the most "perfect" issue of *Drummer*; and the two of us, in one mad moment, collaborated on the music and lyrics of a satirical theme song for *Drummer* and the "Mr Drummer" contest: "Masochist Stomp."

Regarding the manufacture of "gay music" during the twenty-four years of the 214 issues of *Drummer*, I have one eyewitness anecdote about publisher John Embry's egregious full-page promotions of his lover's disco career which was scorned by the leathermen subscribers as much as was the Cycle Sluts coverage. The lover's name from Spain was "Mario Simon" aka "Mario Simone." This profile of a so-called leather disco singer unfolded like a comedy scene played by a *haute* queen in a gay movie.

Drummer loved Latin men. The first "Mr. Drummer" was the Argentinian pornstar and *Drummer* coverman, Val Martin. He was, in 180-degree sense, the photogenic and masculine version of *Drummer* publisher John Embry's own longtime Latin lover, Mario Simon, who was an ethereal immigrant from Spain to LA, and built chunky like Embry. When Mario Simon arrived as a human hatbox with the *Drummer* luggage in the move from LA to San Francisco, Embry introduced Mario as "a singer who is famous in Spain for his best-selling disco recordings." When we all stopped laughing, staff cartoonist Al Shapiro considered working the following line into his satirical strip *Harry Chess*: "I'm 'famous in Spain' like Jerry Lewis is 'beloved in France.'" Onetime *Drummer* editor Jeanne Barney remembered that the famous leather author Larry Townsend openly jibed Embry by saying, "Give my regards to that 'Puerto Rican.'" And Embry would reply, "The 'Puerto Rican' says hello."

Embry himself revealed in *Manifest Reader* 26 (January 1996) that even when they lived in LA, Mario was not suited for the business of *Drummer* and Alternate Publishing's enterprises.

Mario shouldered a chip of an attitude about Embry's moving them to San Francisco because show biz is in Los Angeles. Mario Simon as Embry's life partner had a right to a certain status and dignity. But, I must confess, the irreverent 1970s Divisadero Street staff at *Drummer*, thought him a condescending LA attitude queen who had arrived in San Francisco on a vaporetto of his own imagining.

One camp image clung to him: being arrested in a splash of sangria at the Slave Auction when the anti-gay LAPD busted *Drummer* in 1976. Embry later verified the joke in *Super MR* #5, page 35, "For the Slave Auction, Mario...prepared gallons of real Spanish sangria, with red wine and fresh fruit."

Rarely did Mario show up at our office, but when he did appear, he entered the room voice first, swathed in a cloud of Hai Karate cologne, dragging his mink. Channeling the iconic 1940s film star, Maria Felix, who was the Mexican Marilyn Monroe, Mario exuded an attitude of petulant entitlement, even though during my editorship he had nothing to do with *Drummer* except parade through the office carrying his Capezio shoulder-bag stuffed with his Toto-like Cairn Terrier named "Mac" whom Embry flew in from Spain. His English was a new and second language, and so not very useful to an American magazine needing a proofreader.

In the summer of 1978, *Evita* opened at the Orpheum Theater in San Francisco before its premiere on Broadway. If Mario had stood in front of the *Evita* poster, he would have disappeared. Later in 1990, type-casting struck, and he appeared, where he always longed to be, in Southern California on stage in Oxnard in a "Music Theater of Ventura County" production of *Evita*. He played Magaldi, the over-the-top tango singer who gives Evita her first leg up singing "On This Night of a Thousand Stars."

* * * *

Embry once told me, without any sense of irony, that Mario wooed him and won him on their second date by taking out a guitar and singing "Feelings."

Ya just can't make this stuff up!

(See *Manifest Reader* 26, January 1996, page 52.)

“Mario Simon” as spelled in his obituary (March 5, 1942–December 12, 1993) was also known as “Mario Simone.” Long after I exited, Embry listed “Mario Simone” on the masthead of *Drummer* 57 (October 1982) as “General Manager” which was optimistic—and, one figures, tax-deductible...with insurance coverage. Benefits were never offered to us workers. *Drummer* 60 (January 1983) featured a quarter-page “house” ad of Mario wearing a leather vest and headband; the text read simply: “Leather Disco, Valverde, 14, Madrid 13, Spain.” In 1985, the full inside-back cover of *Drummer* 81 (February 1984) blatted terribly flat-footed prose in Embry’s ad for singer “Mario Simon’s [sic] hot new song done by a better singer than one hears in pop music these days. It is exciting.”

Ya think?

Produced by Embry’s Wings Distributing, Mario’s song, “Drummerman,” was backed with “Be My Clown” (insert joke here) and was available on cassette through mail-order for \$7.95. *Drummer*’s Tenth Anniversary Party was also the finals of the Mr. *Drummer* Contest 1985 at the Japan Center Theater. Reporting that event in *Drummer* 85 (December 1985), pages 8 and 10, Embry’s “Social Notes” published a Robert Pruzan photo of Mario Simon of whom it was noted: “Mario Simon belts out... the show-stopper ‘Drummerman’...his Wings recording over the huge theater sound system. It was electrifying.” Maybe. Embry blamed the lack of sales on “Mario’s thick accent.” Perhaps, the *Los Angeles Times* was more spot on, writing, July 19, 1990: “As the first rung on Evita’s ladder to the top, nightclub singer and romantic idol Augustin Magaldi, [Mario] Simon is a pompous, vain popinjay—sort of a Wayne Newton of the pampas.” Was that a back-handed compliment? For someone who was always acting, Mario Simon (1942-1993) just couldn’t act.