

## WHAT IT MEANS TO BE QUEER IN MUSIC

With the beginning of a new decade, it's essential that we remember how far mainstream music has come in its forms of representation. No longer do men in glittery, tight-pressed jumpsuits serenade fat-bottomed girls and crowd-surf audiences of ignorance and denial. We can acknowledge when artists are gay, and most of us can even accept it. That being said, I wish more than anything that I could go back in time and gently insist to my questioning, fourteen-year-old, never-missed-an-episode-of-*Glee* self that the world of the LGBTQ+ is not limited to Kurt Hummels or Hayley Kiyokos. It is not limited, either, to subtle queerbaiting on behalf of straight artists attempting to cultivate a stan-Twitter following. If you like girls, you've got two forks in the road. Either salivate over Ariana's sapphic tension between another woman in her "break up with your girlfriend, i'm bored" music video (the twist is that the straight girl actually wants to kiss the other girl, get it?), or smear your cheeks in rainbow paint and belt an overdone, poppy Tumblr-era chant about what it means to be loud and proud. In a world where music is so abundantly available and social media is so obnoxiously present, queer people deserve better than to be categorized by their queerness.

Mainstream hip-hop has especially flourished in acceptance and representation within the last decade. Openly bisexual Frank Ocean broke ground with a discography full of dreamy, melancholic songs such as "Chanel," capturing the duality between masculinity and femininity. Ocean's counterpart from their shared former act Odd Future is Tyler, the Creator, whose sexuality is more speculated. Amidst homophobic controversy, he has made numerous references to same-sex attraction, particularly in his newest and most refined album *IGOR*, comprised of songs in which he confronts both a closeted lover and himself—"you never lived your truth, but I finally found peace, so peace." Tyler's musical style has evolved from a dark and fuming grittiness to something more vulnerably soulful, a transition that seems to have inspired openly gay founding member of BROCKHAMPTON, Kevin Abstract. "I love my mom, I hate my boyfriend," Abstract sings in his solo work "American Boyfriend," serving as a testament to the complexity of love and relationships that transcends sexuality.

These are, of course, artists that are revered by the media; they succeed in breaking convention, but still manage to fit the expected mold of Grammy-winning music. Lesser-streamed artists, too, blur this line of identity and style alike. Queer singer-songwriter Dev Hynes is better known for his alias Blood Orange, wowing both listeners and the singers he writes for (such as A\$AP Rocky and Tinashe) with his versatility and slow, jazzy pace. Gauzy anthems like "Charcoal Baby" are dedicated, as Hynes writes on Instagram, to anyone that has ever felt "not black enough, too black, too queer, or not queer the right way." Marie Ulven takes a different approach in her indie pop-rock act Girl in Red, with both brutally honest and youthfully flippant lyrics about her attraction to women ("they're so pretty it hurts; I'm not talking 'bout boys, I'm talking 'bout girls"). Orville Peck lulls his audience with a style reminiscent of classic American outlaw country music, a desert-road twang that serves as an ode to "the boys that walk on by," as he puts it in "Dead of Night." And although she's recently climbed the charts, Brooklyn-based King Princess remains authentic and tender while she croons over lost love and self-deprecation in a heteronormative society.

At the end of the day, musical forms of expression are complex, layered, and different for everybody. I don't write this to encourage "softer" representation, and if Troye Sivan truly is your thing, there's nothing wrong with that. But identity is so incredibly personal, and that's what makes all of these artists (and all of these consumers, for that matter) unique individuals who

embrace themselves in every aspect. It's valid to be as proud as it is to be reluctant, as it is to be angry, to be in love, to be jaded, to be hurt, because music surpasses the expected—presupposed identity be damned.