

On March 1, 2024, I saw Tyler Matheson's call for queer love songs on social media. As someone whose job it is to think and write about the queer functions of musical sound, I was intrigued. The call included no specific requirements for genre, era, or the artists' sexuality, and without parameters I worried that the resulting collection wouldn't be cohesive. In watching this exhibition develop, however, I've realized that the varied mix of songs—the collection's incongruity and disparity—is precisely the point.

In 1998, music scholar Christopher Small coined the term “musicing” (a verb, as in: “to music”) and encouraged everyone to adopt it into their vocabularies. Few did, but maybe it'll catch on eventually. He argues that “to music” is to participate—in *any* form—in musical sound, including listening to records, playing an instrument, dancing, or even doing labour behind the scenes that is often invisible at a live performance (cleaners, ushers, sound techs, etc.). Ultimately, our ability to listen to music is made possible by the efforts of many. The shift from music as a noun to a verb, Small argues, allows us to better understand that all musical experiences are, first and foremost, a way of being in relation with others: “the act of musicing establishes... a set of relationships, *and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies*” (13). Even in those painfully lonely and solitary listening experiences, we are bound through sound to so many others: those who made the music, those we associate with the music, and, if we're lucky, those individuals who unexpectedly came into our lives and changed the way we hear every song, every lyric, every note.

Love is the Message
Craig Jennex

The relational nature of music—the way it connects us, for better or for worse, to others—is fundamental to Tyler Matheson's *Toward a Methexic Queer Media*. Viewers move between private and public listening experiences: from headphones, cocooned with a single song on repeat, to a karaoke space that forces collective presence whether we are in the audience or performing in front of it. Without explanation or detail from those who submitted songs, attendees know only one thing: each song we hear is part of a soundtrack of queer life. Matheson's presentation of the collection of submissions forces us to think creatively about the function of music and queerness: what makes these songs love songs? What makes them *queer* love songs? These questions in turn push us to conjure queer possibilities: what does this song mean? What *could* this song mean?

The title of Matheson's show comes from the last piece José Esteban Muñoz published before his death in December 2013. In his article, Muñoz calls for a methexic turn in queer media—an emphasis on creative work that invites group sharing, participation, communion, or simply experiencing the process of becoming, *together*. This force of methexis has animated Matheson's work for years. At Trinity Square Video in 2023, for example, I circled *Your Disco Needs You* and strained to hear the barely audible karaoke accompaniment piped through a speaker above my head. When the installation's titular track played, I quietly hummed along with Kylie—and quickly realized that in that moment I was in relation with Matheson, with the individuals I think of when I listen to that song, and with all the gallery attendees who were similarly pulled into the piece and the collective experiences it provoked.

Together, Matheson's exhibition and Muñoz's call for methexis help us to understand the queer potential of participatory media. In this exhibition, each private listen and public lyrical utterance reshapes the meaning of the songs, singers, listeners, and worlds in which we exist. The music we hear is based on a logic of repetition: we listen again and again to queer love songs, and we might even perform karaoke—arguably the most common way of covering (or re-performing) a piece of music. Indeed, situating karaoke as a form of collective queer becoming asks us to recognize the way the genre functions as a form of drag performance: it is at once a tribute and a transformation as well as a practiced form of play that challenges conventional presentation and logic. Can all musical listening offer this promise of alteration?

Matheson offers gallery viewers a takeaway in the form of a mixed CD, comprised of the songs submitted by community members for this exhibition, acting as a reminder of the inherent messiness of queer experiences and the promise of queer possibility gifted us through musical sound. Listen closely. Sing along. Let's think about what this temporary state of relationality might allow us to imagine and work toward. In this state—this momentary connection—everything could change.