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heterosexual if they are discomfited by the alternative. I suggest that it was intended as a token effort to placate those who don't want to see. Though their union was sudden, willing eyes do not have to work too hard to see a more comprehensible courtship in the cuts.

As I have argued, 'Renaissance' Australian films do offer glimpses of the elusive figure of the lesbian if you are prepared to see her. I have located *Picnic at Hanging Rock* as the paradigm of the submerged and ignored lesbian. Sara serves as the poster girl of the visibility for which I have argued. We need to rescue the lesbian from the subtext and see through the authoritative disavowal and erasure in and of these foundational texts. These are our texts too. *Cass* should not have disappeared; *The Alternative* must not be inaccessible, it must go in our queer canon. Let's see Sara. Let's see Melanie and Linda. Let's enjoy what we can of Laura and Evelyn's brief romance. Let's read these texts queerly and proudly. Let's not get cheated anymore. Let's destroy the mystery. *Picnic* is our film. Sara is our hero.

Chapter 7

MUSICALS ARE GAY

A Brief History of Gay Men, Hollywood Divas and Movie Musicals

Scott McKinnon

All gay men love musicals. That statement isn't true, of course; many, perhaps even most, don't. But it is nevertheless a truism that has long operated within gay culture and within the framing of that culture by the broader society. As argued by Brett Farmer, 'Gay subcultural fascinations with the Hollywood musical are arguably the most visible, certainly the most frequently cited, facet of gay spectatorial fascinations'.¹ Or, as one post on gay internet news portal *SameSame* put it, 'Musicals are gay'.² Given the birth of a visible gay male culture has most prominently been based on public statements of same-sex sexual desire, the altogether public tying of gay male pleasures to a genre from which sex is generally absent might seem surprising. The link between gay men's sexual desires and the generally chaste movie musical genre lies, however, in a specific disruption of heteronormative notions of gender performance. Musicals have most frequently been positioned as a feminised element of culture. The very visible place of the musical in gay male culture acts, therefore, as another way in which gay men disrupt notions of appropriate gender behaviour, in

¹ Brett Farmer, *Spectacular Passions: Cinema, Fantasy, Gay Male Spectatorships*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000, p. 69.

² 'Robbie', 'Favourite Musicals', *SameSame* Forums, 23 April 2009, <http://www.samesame.com.au/forum/archive/index.php/t-8649.html>. Accessed 30 September 2010.

this case not through desiring the 'wrong' gender, but through celebrating the 'wrong' heavily gendered cultural products.

In this chapter, I trace links between Australian gay male cultures and the Hollywood movie musical from the 1930s until the early 2000s, finding a long-standing place for musicals both within gay male fandom and in the ways in which gay male culture is understood by the broader society. Through media reports, oral histories and online commentary, I trace the remarkably consistent use of this film genre as a means by which to define gay men and their cultural pleasures. Via wizards in Oz, divas in Hollywood, and nuns in Austria, I argue that, although homosexual male identities have changed substantially through this time period, the Hollywood musical has consistently been linked to those identities in the public imagination.

Alexander Doty has noted that, despite the 'rich history of queers producing and reading' film genres such as the musical, 'surprisingly little has been done to formally express this cultural history'.³ Brett Farmer perhaps takes this work the furthest in his attempts to address 'gay male engagements with the Hollywood musical'.⁴ Farmer's work is a specific attempt to theorise gay male spectatorial pleasures in the musical through a psychoanalytic framework, in a sense trying to understand what it is about the musical that draws so many gay male fans. He suggests, for example, that, 'The musical number is frequently the site of a liminal breakdown of Oedipalized desire and heterosexual normativity resides in a musical's extensive representation of various forms of gender or sexual perversion'.⁵

I'm not seeking here to expand on Farmer's psychoanalytic work or further theorise on what it is about the musical that draws gay male fans. Nor am I seeking to address that attraction specifically under the heading of 'camp'. Although a notoriously elusive term, camp, as argued by Jack Babuscio, can be defined as 'those elements in a person, situation, or activity which express, or are created by, a gay sensibility'.⁶ To Babuscio, camp exists in 'a relationship between activities, individuals, situations, and gayness'. There is no doubt that many, if not all, musicals can be read as camp, and that the relationship between gay men and musicals exists somewhere in this label,

³ Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p. 14.

⁴ Farmer, *Spectacular Passions*, p. 69.

⁵ Farmer, *Spectacular Passions*, p. 86.

⁶ Jack Babuscio, 'Camp and the Gay Sensibility', in Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin, eds, *Queer Cinema: the Film Reader*, New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 122.

but in this chapter I am focusing less on *why* that relationship exists but more so *how* it is acknowledged, both by gay men and in the discourses of the broader public.

My aim, therefore, is to explore how interwoven notions of gender and sexual identity have operated in those Australian public discourses that have defined gay male culture through the movie musical. In the wider society, this has acted as a heavily gendered method of signifying gay male identity. Once operating as a means by which to position gay men in a liminal space, on view but hidden, it has subsequently operated to place gay life as an undeniable element of public discourses, indicated through cultural, not sexual, preferences. It has equally operated at times as a means by which to denigrate or mock gay men. In a misogynistic, gendered hierarchy of tastes, which describes 'feminine' cultural products as frivolous and insubstantial, gay men's preferences, and hence subjectivities, are also placed as less significant and less important than interests deemed more appropriate to their gender.

In light of this, the movie musical has acted for some gay men as a way of performing a defiantly and pleurably transgressive form of gender and sexual identity. To assert cultural preferences in defiance of proscribed gender roles has operated as a form of 'coming out'. It is a means both of forming and of indicating a connection to community through shared cultural, rather than – or as well as – sexual interests. For other gay men, the truism 'all gay men love musicals' must always be disproved, with a personal dislike of the genre offered as evidence. A rejection of this cultural preference becomes in itself a defiant assertion of a different, perhaps ultimately more inclusive definition of gay male identity.

First, Let's Go See the Wizard

The movie musical has a rich, if occasionally troubled history as a Hollywood product. From the very first moments of the sound era – when Al Jolson burst into song in *The Jazz Singer* (1927) – until well into the 1960s, the genre enjoyed a life as a movie theatre mainstay. Particularly in the decade following World War II, when studio MGM produced films like *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), *The Band Wagon* (1953) and *An American in Paris* (1951), the musical almost seemed to define the meaning of 'Hollywood'. Fading in popularity from the 1970s onwards, titles like *Chicago* (2002), *Dreamgirls* (2006) and *Hairspray* (2007) have created a small musical revival in the new millennium.

Although countless Hollywood musicals have played in Australia, two titles in particular have appeared again and again in the course of researching this chapter. Each of these films contains characters that can be – and have been – read as gay, but neither contains an openly gay character nor any suggestion of sex beyond rather chaste, heterosexual kisses. Despite this, each film has developed a long-standing place in gay male culture. These films live on in the individual memories of many gay men; in the collective memories of gay male communities; and in the ways in which those communities are framed in wider discourses. If *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and *The Sound of Music* (1963) would seem at first glance to be stories of childhood adventure and heterosexual romance respectively, they have both nonetheless become significant moments in gay male histories.

Arguing in 1978 for the political importance of gay and lesbian film festivals, Australian activist and academic Dennis Altman suggested that it was valuable for the community to ask questions such as, 'How is *The Wizard of Oz* a gay movie?'⁷ Although ostensibly a children's story of witches, magic and Munchkins, the film's narrative, not to mention its star, go some way to answering Altman's question. Gay icon Judy Garland plays Dorothy, a Kansas farm-girl who longs for a place 'over the rainbow' where life is freer, safer and where dreams really do come true. Caught up in a tornado, she is flung from the black and white world of her rural home into the bright technicolour of Oz. Travelling the yellow brick road, she meets three fellow misfits – the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Cowardly Lion – who will each only find happiness and an understanding of his true self once he makes it to the sparkling Emerald City with Dorothy.

This story is easily read as an allegory of the journeys many gay men have made to the big city, at times carrying with them their love of Judy. As Pamela Robertson has argued, the film contains a 'narrative about leaving conventional models of domesticity and creating alternate families and alternate homes'.⁸ In 1997, Dennis Altman would frame his own life in similar terms, stating in his autobiography, 'I had grown up rather like Dorothy ... believing that once I left Kansas (Tasmania) the black and white of life would undoubtedly become technicolour.'⁹ Popular American website *After Elton*, reporting on the film's 70th anniversary, argued,

⁷ Dennis Altman, 'Film Festivals: The Importance of Images', *Campaign* (May 1978), p. 20.

⁸ Pamela Robertson, 'Home and Away: Friends of Dorothy on the Road in Oz', in Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, eds, *The Road Movie Book*, London: Routledge, 1997, p. 274.

⁹ Dennis Altman, *Defying Gravity: A Political Life*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1997, p. 31.

What gay doesn't know what it's like to have grown up in a seemingly black-and-white world where he's felt stifled? The promise of some place 'over the rainbow', to be free to be gay has driven many a small-town queen from his burg to more accepting urban areas.¹⁰

It is a journey taken by many gay men in the seventy-plus years of the film's life; men who, not coincidentally, have at times called themselves 'Friends of Dorothy'. While its origins are uncertain, the use of that label as an indicator of homosexual identity may well have begun with Garland's character, tying her well-known popularity among gay audiences to the love she inspires in her queer friends, the Scarecrow, the Tin-Man and the Lion.¹¹ Whether the origin of the phrase or not, this well-known explanation of a frequently used term suggests long-standing connections between Dorothy's friends on-screen and in the audience.

These connections have spanned decades, with the film enduring as a widely acknowledged element of gay male cultures. 'For what else', asked Peter Kemp in 1997, 'is MGM's studio-confect Oz but the ultimate drag bar over the rainbow way up high?'¹² In 2009, a review of a 'Sing-Along' DVD version of the film in gay newspaper *Sydney Star Observer* advised readers that you can 'sing along with Judy Garland and her camp cast of friends' and that this version was 'as gay as the name suggests'.¹³ In 2010, *Time Out* magazine argued that the film was as important to gay men as the annual State of Origin rugby league series was to everyone else.¹⁴ And in 2011, the Sydney Mardi Gras float of the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby had a *Wizard of Oz* theme, with organisers declaring, 'Sydney is indeed the Emerald City, and we are the Land of Oz!'¹⁵

¹⁰ John Hobbs, 'The Wizard of Oz turns 70', *After Elton*, 25 August 2009, <http://www.afterelton.com/blog/jhobbs/wizard-of-oz-seventieth-anniversary>. Accessed 13 November 2011.

¹¹ Luca Prono, *Encyclopedia of Gay and Lesbian Popular Culture*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008, p. 107.

¹² Peter Kemp, 'Secret Love (or gays and musicals: An attractive connection)', in Claire Jackson and Peter Tapp, eds, *The Bent Lens: A World Guide to Gay and Lesbian Film*, St Kilda: Australian Catalogue Company, 1997, p. 19.

¹³ See: 'The Wizard of Oz', *Sydney Star Observer*, 8 December 2009, <http://www.starobserver.com.au/reviews/2009/12/08/see-the-wizard-of-oz/19499>. Accessed 1 July 2010.

¹⁴ 'Mardi Gras Performing Arts', *Time Out Sydney*, 17 January 2010, <http://www.au.timeout.com/sydney/gay-lesbian/features/5776/sydney-mardi-gras-2010-performing-arts>. Accessed 4 November 2012.

¹⁵ K. McDonald, 'Speaking Out – Lobby to march down the yellow brick road', *Star Online*, 19 January, <http://www.starobserver.com.au/opinion/soapbox-opinion/2011/01/19/speaking-out-lobby-to-march-down-the-yellow-brick-road/42369>. Accessed 18 October 2011.

Thus, the relationship between gay male cultural investments and this particular movie musical has been a remarkably enduring – and frequently noted – element of a culture and community that has rapidly changed since *The Wizard of Oz* was first screened. That gay men have found something of their own experiences in the film's narrative may go some way to explaining its popularity with this particular audience. Just as notable, however, is the very public role of that popularity in the broader society's understandings of gay culture. When *The Wizard of Oz* played as part of a Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in 1992, for example, *Sydney Morning Herald* critic Christine Cremen complained that the film looked less representative of current gay cinema and more 'like the sort of movie that an observant straight might have programmed for a gay film festival'.¹⁶ To Cremen, associations between gay men and the film were so widely known by heterosexual people as to have become a cliché more indicative of straight opinions than gay choices. It is not just that gay male culture includes the musical within, therefore, but that gay male culture is defined by the musical from without. To understand more about that definition, it is time to leave Oz and head to the land of the Hollywood diva.

The Glamorous Diva

Judy Garland is just one of the many Hollywood divas to have won the hearts of gay male audiences and to have long symbolised gay male culture to the outside world. In the words of Richard Dyer, Garland encompassed both 'a star image with strong elements of difference ... and a way of interpreting homosexual identity that is widely available in society in both dominant and subcultural discourses'.¹⁷ Gay men have put their love of such divas to use in structuring and performing their identities. The wider society has equally defined their understanding of gay male cultures and identities through these Hollywood stars.

In the decade after *The Wizard of Oz* was first released, for example, connections to Hollywood movies, including musicals, acted as one means by which to discuss homosexual men in the Australian tabloid media and one means by which camp men performed difference. A nascent community living in hiding was at times visibly identified by its cultural preferences.

¹⁶ Christine Cremen, 'Opening up the Celluloid Closet', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 February 1992, p. 54.

¹⁷ Richard Dyer, 'Judy Garland and Gay Men', in Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin, eds, *Queer Cinema: the Film Reader*, New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 163.

Although this may have removed the need for any public discussion of actual same-sex sexual activities, the gendered nature of these preferences was also condemned.

Men in drag made the pages of the local tabloid press in the 1940s and 1950s, often identifying themselves with names such as 'Lana Turner', 'Rita Hayworth' and 'Vivien Leigh'.¹⁸ A photograph, published in a 1954 *Truth* article featured the description, 'A woman? No! This is Wally, known as Vivien Leigh, photographed at a drag party where she danced with a sailor friend'.¹⁹ Such articles created a very public connection between Hollywood glamour and effeminated homosexual male identities, as well as indicating the ways in which homosexual men were putting the movies to use in developing and performing these identities.

Steve Cohan, in exploring the history of camp and the musical, has argued that a shared interest in particular Hollywood stars acted at one time as a kind of 'alibi' for American homosexual men, reflecting, 'an "innocent" common interest while at the same time signalling to each other another shared interest'.²⁰ If we address gay men's connections to musicals purely from a perspective of sexual desire, then this interest can certainly be seen as 'innocent'. However, if we instead note the gendered implications of such pleasures, then their effectiveness as an alibi, at least in Australia, becomes less clear.

Post-war Australia was a society of strict, and strictly enforced, gender roles. As argued by John Murphy, masculinity was enormously influenced by the consequences of war, with 'desirable attributes of manhood signified by what war valued and expected'.²¹ Dressing in drag and adopting the name of a much-loved diva may have been an extreme statement of fandom, but it is possible that public recognition of these camp pleasures led to broader suspicion. Expressions of an overly enthusiastic enjoyment of 'feminine' entertainments sat well outside 'desirable attributes' of manhood and may have acted, therefore, less as a masked and hidden signification of desire than as a suspicious indicator of gender non-conformity.

¹⁸ Garry Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain: History of a Gay Sub-Culture*, Sydney: Hale & Tremonger, 1991, p. 95.

¹⁹ 'Shame of Sydney: Tremendous Upsurge in Immorality by Teenagers', *Truth*, 16 May 1954, p. 11.

²⁰ Steven Cohan, *Incongruous Entertainment: Camp, Cultural Value, and the MGM Musical*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005, p. 14.

²¹ John Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties, Private Sentiment and Political Culture in Menzies' Australia*, Sydney: UNSW Press, 2000, p. 35.

In an oral history interview, one gay man, David, who had developed a drag persona through the 1950s and worked professionally as a drag artiste in the 1960s, offered a memory which suggests the ways in which gay men in that era adopted movie musicals into their culture and the importance of gender in this adoption. A lifelong movie fan, with an encyclopaedic knowledge of the lives and works of Hollywood divas, David particularly remembered a scene from the film *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953). Noting that the film had famously featured Marilyn Monroe performing 'Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend', David stated that 'the number that I liked best in that movie was Jane Russell doing "Ain't There Anyone Here for Love?" with the Olympic Team'.²²

Set in a gymnasium, the 'Ain't There Anyone Here for Love?' scene has become something of a landmark in the gay film canon, largely on the basis of the crowd of near-naked male athletes who form a surprisingly disinterested chorus around the sexy but frustrated diva. 'Tennis, anyone?' asks Russell, gazing her eyes across the flesh on display, but these men are far more interested in working their rippling muscles than in having anything to do with this beautiful and sexually available female. We are left to wonder, if a woman like Russell can't attract their attention, then what woman could?

There is, therefore, a strong connection between (homo)sexual desire and the scene David describes, and it is true that, as argued by Alexander Doty, there exists a significant 'gay beefcake musical history' which includes many of the films of the likes of Gene Kelly and Elvis Presley.²³ In our interview, however, David described his pleasure in the scene as much for its gendered implications as for its homoeroticism. Significantly, he recalled that Jane Russell 'struts through that number like a drag queen'. In David's memory, therefore, the gay man is not the muscled athlete but the female diva. Russell is read as both glamorous diva and gay man dressed as glamorous diva. David places himself in the scene not as an athlete ready for fun in the post-workout showers but as the diva dancing and singing.

The reception of a more recent Hollywood musical further highlights the complicated gender of the diva in gay men's relationship to the musical genre. Released in Australia in 2007, the film *Dreamgirls* tells the story of an all-female African-American singing trio and their journey from unknowns to popular sensations. Reporting on its upcoming release, Australian gay

²² Interview with David W., 17 September 2008. Unless otherwise stated, all interviews were conducted by the author and recordings are held by him.

²³ Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer*, p. 10.

magazine *DNA* labelled the film 'the gayest movie of the year' and 'a modern-day gay showstopper'.²⁴ This description of a film that contains no openly gay characters acts, in part, as a form of promotion within the marketing of the film to gay audiences. It also makes clear, however, that 'gay' is at times publicly defined by gendered cultural preferences for singing on-screen divas rather than same-sex sexual desire.

It is interesting to note that 2007 also saw the cinematic release of *Shortbus*, a film containing several scenes of unsimulated gay male sex. Although it trod that fine line between pornography and cinematic art, and followed the stories of several gay men among an ensemble cast of sexual outsiders, *Shortbus* does not appear to have been considered by *DNA* in their assessment of the year's gayest film. That honour went instead to a musical in which a trio of strong, glamorous women belt out a number of highly emotional show tunes. Such labelling reveals the continued linking of gay male identity with the musical genre; assumes and encourages excitement about the film by gay men; and speaks to the widely known place of such films in gay male culture.

A gently satirical article by a gay writer published in Melbourne broadsheet the *Age* used *Dreamgirls* to offer both a playful mockery and a celebration of gay men's widely known, or assumed, cultural tastes. Columnist Tim Hunter wrote that his lack of interest in the film had led him to think, 'Maybe I'm not gay after all', and left him 'waiting for the Gay Police to come around to revoke my gay licence'.²⁵ He was reassured that this wouldn't happen, however, by a range of other gay 'stereotypes' to which he did fit, including 'that [he had] watched *Brokeback Mountain* more than once — and cried every time'.

It is highly significant that this discussion was taking place in the mainstream — rather than gay — media, thus indicating the role of the musical in the ways in which gay male culture continues to be framed in public discourses. If once a suspicious indicator of sexual deviance exposed in the pages of 1950s tabloids, the connection between the musical diva and gay men was now so widely acknowledged that it could be the source of good-natured satire in a broadsheet newspaper. In each case, the gendered nature of these film entertainments was used as a means by which gay men performed their identities and by which the wider society defined those identities.

²⁴ *DNA Magazine*, edition 88, http://www.dnamagazine.com.au/default.asp?section_id=217. Accessed 8 October 2007.

²⁵ Tim Hunter, 'Not all Queens are Show Queens', *Age*, Summer Age section, 17 January 2007, p. 3.

Of Nuns and Mountains

If *Dreamgirls* seemed like the gayest movie of 2007, it nonetheless remains doubtful that the film will equal the enduring place in gay culture of one particular musical released more than forty years earlier. In the year 1965, a novice nun twirled on to screen atop a mountain, bursting into song and guaranteeing her place in the heart of many a gay man. Charting the historical reception of *The Sound of Music* will take us through to the 2000s, and offers examples, across decades, which further indicate the ways in which gay men have made use of this genre as a gendered signifier of identity. This use has operated in three ways, each specifically tied to issues of gender performance. First, the film has been used as the basis of a range of entertainments by gay performers. Second, it has appeared in the personal narratives of many gay men as an indicator of identity. And third, the film has come to operate as part of a specifically gendered mechanism through which the heterosexual mainstream imagines gay identity and culture.

The Sound of Music famously tells the story of Maria (Julie Andrews), a novice in an Austrian convent struggling to conform to religious life. Sent as a governess to a large family of misbehaving children, Maria eventually wins the affections of this unruly tribe, along with the love of their widowed father. Facing threats from the newly powerful Nazi party, the family forms a singing troupe, recruits the assistance of some wily nuns and flees across the mountains to the safety of Switzerland.

The public adoption of this film by Sydney's gay community began not long after it was first released, when it became the subject of a drag performance at gay nightclub The Purple Onion. No fan of Julie Andrews, the Purple Onion's star performer Beatrice (David Williams) renamed the show *The Sound of Mucus* and relegated Maria to a chorus girl role. The first act lead instead became Mother Superior (played by Beatrice), with the second act lead becoming The Baroness (also played by Beatrice).²⁶ Across decades, the film would then provide source material for a wide array of gay entertainments in Sydney. Another drag version, for example, was performed at the Imperial Hotel in 2004.²⁷ Sing-along screenings have become a regular element of the annual Mardi Gras cultural festival.²⁸

²⁶ Interview with David Williams conducted by the Pride History Group, 8 September 2005. Interview held in the collection of the Pride History Group, Sydney.

²⁷ '2004 Winners', Diva Awards Australia website, <http://divaawardsaustralia.com.au/index.php?page=winners04>. Accessed 7 November 2010.

²⁸ 'Sink your teeth into Mardi Gras' second week', *SameSame*, 15 February 2008, <http://www.samesame.com.au/features/1978/Sink-Your-Teeth-Into-Mardi-Gras->

Other adaptations of the film have been a not-infrequent element of that festival in various years, including a gay and lesbian band known as the Homotones performing songs from the film accompanied by the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence,²⁹ and an autobiographical one-man-play titled *SingSing* whose author stated, 'I still can't watch that movie without losing control of my emotions'.³⁰

Aside from these public performances of identification with the film, *The Sound of Music* also appears within the personal narratives of many gay men as a recalled childhood signpost to adult sexual identity. Brett Farmer, for example, has written of his passionate childhood devotion to the film's star, Julie Andrews. A favourite childhood pastime of Farmer's was to listen to his LP recording of *The Sound of Music* soundtrack while gazing intently at a scene from the film featured on the album's cover. He writes:

Projecting myself into the scene, I would twirl with Julie in imaginary freedom, riding the crest of her crystalline voice in rapturous transport from the suburban mundanities of family, school, and straightness.³¹

To Farmer, an engagement with this film was a means by which to 'transfigure the oppressive boundaries of the heteronormative'.³² A connection to the film is recalled, therefore, as a form of escape from the restrictive and heavily gendered world of childhood, as well as a connection to gay male fandom long before ever coming out as gay.

Similarly, oral history interviewee John, who first saw *The Sound of Music* in a cinema re-release at the age of seven, stated:

Jesus, that movie changed my life, you know. Seven years of age, going, seeing Maria and the nuns and the Von Trapp kids and the Austrian Alps. Seriously changed my life, like, I can still remember walking out of the cinema that day and the sun was shining so brightly as it should have been 'cause I had just seen *The Sound of Music* and just been captivated by it.³³

Second-Week.htm. Accessed 20 October 2010.

²⁹ 'Sweet Music', *Sydney Star Observer*, <http://www.starobserver.com.au/news/2008/04/20/sweet-music/10657>. Accessed 20 October 2010.

³⁰ Angela Kamper, 'Debut Play Came While He Was Dreaming', *Daily Telegraph*, 5 February 1999, p. 39.

³¹ Brett Farmer, 'The Fabulous Sublimity of Diva Worship', *Camera Obscura*, no. 59 (2005), p. 168.

³² Farmer, 'The Fabulous Sublimity', p. 168.

³³ Interview with John, 26 November 2008.

Unfortunately for both Farmer and John, the gendered implications of their love for Andrews led to schoolyard bullying. Andrews was the 'wrong' kind of star for a boy to worship and their public devotion was seen as a suspicious indicator of difference. The love of Andrews, and of musicals in general, may have provided enormous pleasure but, in the strictly monitored world of schoolyard gender politics, could also label a boy as an outsider, unable or unwilling to express interest in those entertainments deemed appropriate within a gendered hierarchy of tastes.

For many of the gay men who have experienced such bullying because of their childhood cultural pleasures, coming out as gay in adulthood is subsequently described not only as the location of a community with shared sexual desires, but also one which legitimises and shares their cultural preferences. A love disparaged in childhood or adolescence becomes a moment of shared passion in adulthood, whether that passion be for the male form or for the musical genre. A community of desire can form around these shared preferences, while a community of memory may be formed by those with common experiences of childhood bullying.

The Sound of Music resides, therefore, as a publicly expressed element of gay male culture. What's more, the film has developed a significant, symbolic place in the ways in which gay male culture is defined from outside that culture. An Internet discussion held, of all places, on the website BigFooty.com, suggests how this continued to operate in 2010. That website is a news portal and online discussion page related to anything and everything to do with Australian Rules football. In April 2010, on the site's discussion board, a user posted the question, 'What's the gayest thing you've ever done?' The user, identified as 'Harry Tiger', had been prompted to ask this question by the fact that he was downloading *The Sound of Music* from the internet, which he thought was a classic that he should see. He stated, 'I know it's on TV an awful lot but I've never really been too interested because it's so long and it's ... well, it's *The Sound of Music*, it's gay.'³⁴

Allowing for the possibility that not all participants on the site were heterosexual, 'Harry Tiger' sought to clarify the intent of his question by stating that he didn't want to hear about things that were 'actually gay' such as 'rimming' or other sexual practices. While some respondents continued to relate the term to homosexual sex, another poster attempted to clarify

³⁴ 'What's the gayest thing you've ever done?', Big Footy, <http://www.bigfooty.com/forum/archive/index.php/t-688929.html>. Accessed 12 July 2010.

further by stating, 'This thread is about the most feminine thing you have done, if you want to get technical'.

Musicals were therefore placed as a feminised entertainment, enjoyment of which may – somewhat playfully – place in question the sexuality of any purportedly heterosexual male. In this gendered online space, in which a devotion to Australian Rules football was understood as an appropriately masculine and heterosexual pursuit, the decision to watch *The Sound of Music* could only be defined as both feminine and gay. To some, the desire to see muscled men in tight shorts frequently tackle each other to the ground might seem more in line with homoerotic visual pleasures than a musical featuring a chorus of singing nuns. Gay men's cinematic preferences – or, at least, the public conception of those preferences – are revealed here as being almost as important as sexual desire in certain definitions of sexual identity.

We Don't All Hear the Music

If, as I argued above, the history of gay men's cultural investments in the musical has been under-explored, largely absent from even this limited history are those gay men who don't share this particular film preference. In charting the history of gay male identity's connections to the movie musical, therefore, some space should be made for those gay men uninvested in this particular genre. The tying of gay male identity to the musical has become so predominant that those who dislike or feel no particular devotion to the genre often find themselves defining their cinematic pleasures, and subsequently even their identities, in opposition to the general view.

A 1973 article in *Gay Lib News*, for example, placed the love of musicals and Hollywood divas as a sad indicator of an outdated identity happily left behind by gay liberation politics. Activist Craig Hanson argued,

It used to be that when most male homosexuals came out of their closets they headed straight for that gay fairyland somewhere way over Judy Garland's rainbow and set up housekeeping as fairy princesses. The gay liberation movement has been an escape from old fairyland, and Judy Garland, and from the traditional gay subculture.³⁵

To Hanson, the effeminacy and cultural conservatism of the Garland-loving man would be swept away by politically radical gay identities. This is a specific rejection of the musical as an aspect of gay culture and as an identifier of gay men. As we have seen, Hanson would prove to be less than

³⁵ Craig Alfred Hanson, 'The Fairy Princess Exposed', *Gay Lib News*, July 1973, p. 3.

prescient in arguing in 1973 that the place of musicals in gay male culture was fading. His argument, however, is a clear of example of a gay man denying any valid connection between gay male identity, movie musicals and the likes of Garland.

In an oral history interview, another gay man, Chris, expressed similar sentiments in a gentler tone. Chris recalled his movie tastes as a teenager in the 1970s and described his particular enjoyment of films from the 1940s and 1950s. He stated that his favourites were 'interestingly, not so much musicals, but it was more the kind of guy films, you know, or Rat Pack films or that kind of stuff – very masculine films.'³⁶ Chris notes, with 'interestingly', that his preferences went against what would be expected for a gay man; that his sexual identity would more likely be taken to indicate that he enjoyed musicals. He also makes clear the gendered nature of these movies, and of the expected movie interests of gay men, through the labelling of certain films as 'masculine', implicitly placing musicals as 'feminine'.

Although expressed in very different ways, both Hanson and Chris highlight the need some gay men may feel to define their identity in opposition to the musical. This again suggests the very public place of the musical in gay male cultures, as well as the importance of gender to the connections between this film genre and that sexual identity. A widespread assumption that same-sex desire also indicates musical love (and vice versa) is refuted by men whose sexual identity holds no place for the musical.

As gay men have become a more openly accepted and acknowledged element of mainstream cultural life, so have their cultural interests become more explicitly – if at times inaccurately or too uniformly – acknowledged. A defiant claiming of sexual desires in the face of oppression and condemnation has been the critical element of gay life over the last forty years. Playing at least some role within this has been a claiming of cultural pleasures in defiance of a strictly gendered hierarchy of tastes. Often recalled as both a subject of childhood happiness and difficulty, the expression of musical love in adulthood becomes a performance of gay male identity which operates almost as publicly as same-sex desire. Although most often containing no gay characters, movie musicals have nonetheless operated as a means by which gay life has become a more visible element of public cultures. The love of this genre has also operated as a means through which some gay men have defied heteronormative gender roles and developed a sense of belonging to community.

³⁶ Interview with Chris, 23 May 2010.

'PERSONS WITH SERIOUS CHARACTER DEFECTS'

Homosexuals in the Commonwealth Public Service,
1953–1974

Robert B. French

In his 1978 study of the Australian intelligence agencies, the journalist Richard Hall made the following intriguing claim: "There is still extant, and unrevoked, a direction from Sir Robert Menzies that no homosexual is to have access to classified documents."¹ He does not elucidate, but obviously the statement raised all sorts of questions: When was this direction given? What was the nature of the direction? Why was it believed that such a direction was necessary? And, given that, as Hall further stated, "One does not have to be on the Committee of the Canberra branch of Gay Lib to know the direction has not been rigidly enforced", there was another question: Just what was the impact of this direction?

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¹ Richard Hall, *The Secret State: Australia's Spy Industry*, Sydney: Cassell, 1978, p. 61. In 1997, I raised this matter with Richard Hall and brought the then recently released Cabinet decision to his attention. He hurriedly added a chapter to his next book. See Richard Hall, "The Dominance of the Active Partner ... is Well-known and Does Not Require Further Emphasis": Homosexuality, Secrets and Bob Menzies', *Black Armband Days: Truth from the Dark Side of Australia's Past*, Milson's Point: Random House Australia, 1998, pp. 186–202. He, in turn, first told me of Grant McIntyre (see below).