



Cover photo: “Untitled” (Portrait of Ross in L.A.), 1991, by Felix González-Torres. An unconventional sculpture consisting of ~175 pounds of individually-wrapped candies, meant to represent Ross Laycock, the artist’s partner who died of complications from AIDS in 1991 (followed by the artist himself in 1996). Although currently off view, audiences were encouraged to take the candies, perhaps representing the slow deterioration and loss of one’s body and being due to the disease. The candies will always be replenished, however, in perpetual remembrance of Ross.

Tracks:

1. [YouTube](#) Chappell Roan - Pink Pony Club (Official Music Video)

Chappell Roan is an American singer-songwriter and lesbian whose pop music and aesthetics take inspiration from camp and drag culture. Eric Wat and Martin Manalansan pointed out during the roundtable that lesbians were an integral part of the gay men’s HIV/AIDS advocacy movement, and the “L” in the term “LGBTQ+” is often pointed out to have been moved to

the front of the acronym largely in recognition of this support. As an acknowledgement of this history and of the misogyny lesbians experience both within and outside the LGBTQ+ community I've placed Roan's single "Pink Pony Club" as my playlist's first song. The song is an inventive tribute to gay bars and clubs in California, detailing a small-town girl's dreams of the fictional Pink Pony Club in West Hollywood; I believe this song reflects queer community and solidarity, especially in a West Coast context.

2. [Dhruv - double take \(Official Video\)](#)

Dhruv Sharma is a Singapore-raised openly gay pop/indie pop musician whose single "double take" went viral on TikTok in 2021. It details his experience of falling in love with another male friend, admitting that "I don't see nobody but you" and asking him "do you feel the love?"

3. [grentperez - Cherry Wine \(Official Lyric Video\)](#)

Grant Perez is an Australian singer-songwriter who blends alternative, indie, R&B, and jazz influences, all rooted in his Filipino upbringing. The love song focuses on a genderless "baby," inviting them to dance and get to know the singer over cherry wine.

4. [Chappell Roan - Naked in Manhattan \(Official Music Video\)](#)

Another song by Chappell Roan from her debut album, I chose this specific song because I believe it reflects the "wild and free" nature of gay culture around the time of the AIDS epidemic as described by our activists. The song is "an inch away" from being sexually explicit, and pays homage to the liberated self-expression inherent to urban queer identity.


5. [Chappell Roan - Red Wine Supernova \(Magician's Cut\)](#)

A more explicit metaphorical depiction of sex and climax, this song is also explicitly described by Chappell Roan as being a "gay girl version" of the 1996 "Champagne Supernova" by Oasis. As Noel Alunit corroborated, sex-positivity is a foundational tenet of AIDS advocacy work.


6. [SunKissed Lola - Pasilyo \(Official Lyric Video\)](#)

Probably one of the best-known Filipino songs on the Internet outside of the Philippines, "Pasilyo" is an indie/pop rock take on Original Pilipino Music. It describes with pronounced poeticism the experience of falling and


being madly in love, with the chorus repeating the Tagalog phrase *ikaw at ikaw*, translating roughly to “it’s only you” or “you and just you” to reflect the single-minded dedication of romance.

7.  Olivia Rodrigo - making the bed (Official Lyric Video)

Olivia Rodrigo is an American pop star of partial Filipino ancestry, also covering music from rock, and folk genres. This ballad is the first melancholic entry in the playlist, depicting experiences of regret, self-alienation, objectification, and putting up a façade over one’s true self in facing the self-inflicted consequences of a “party” lifestyle. I seek to imbue somewhat of a characterless “narrative” into the work using songs like this, taking for example from Napoleon’s recounting that he was infected with HIV from his first-ever sexual experience with another man. Although we should not take HIV infection as a unilateral tragedy or reduce community members to their infection status, I still wanted to make space to portray the possible regret made so potent by its very arising from freedom and liberation.

8.  Olivia Rodrigo - the cure (Official Music Video)

One of Rodrigo’s newest releases, she appears in her music video in a nurse’s outfit and visually portrays a feeling of unravelling via lengths of red string. I found the chorus potent: “But my head is full of poison, and my heart is full of doubt / I got toxins in my bloodstream, you tried hard to suck ‘em out / And it feels like medication, and it’s good for me, I’m sure / But it don’t matter how your love feels anymore / It’ll never be the cure / It’ll never be the cure.” I thought it was a good unintentional metaphor for the experience of HIV/AIDS in itself, but also the general hopelessness that loss amidst the epidemic was inevitable and devastating even in spite of all the love and effort put into community-building.


9.  Car Seat Headrest - "Fill In The Blank"

Car Seat Headrest is an American indie rock band. They often use religious imagery in their work, and this song, which touches on the struggle and hopelessness of depression, is no exception. Similarly to during the HIV/AIDS epidemic, religious guilt, institutional repression, and social stigma

play a large role in the suppression of self in this song: “I get signs / From the cops / Saying, ‘Stay the fuck down’ / I get signs / From the audience / Saying, ‘Stay the fuck down’ / I get signs / From God / Saying, ‘Stay the fuck down.’”

10.  Ethel Cain - Nettles (Official Visualizer)

Ethel Cain is an American singer-songwriter and trans woman whose music draws from ambient and Southern Gothic influences and also heavily features allusions to Christianity. Similarly to that of lesbians, Eric affirmed that the struggle for transgender rights in America has always been an integral part of queer activism, especially as they’ve become a central issue of focus in today’s America. The song tells one part of the album’s wider story of a tragic romance between characters Ethel and Willoughby Tucker; like real-life nettle plants, Ethel’s love inflicts suffering via self-protective mechanisms. The song reflects on these difficulties, the pain of loving and of being loved, of being invisible in a hostile world, and of not being able to help perpetually imagining the tragic loss of Willoughby as her one solace.


11.  yeule - dazies (Official Music Video)

yeule is a nonbinary Singaporean singer-songwriter who blends synth pop, ambient pop, glitch pop, and Asian post-pop. Their music often explores themes of bodily transformation and transcendence via a cyborg alter-ego, although this song focuses more on the process of rot itself. The song’s extended title reads “发现的镜头：转世情人，茫然的菊花，” or “Discovered Footage: Reincarnated Lover, Dazed Chrysanthemum.” Given the background behind the playlist’s cover photo, I thought that the analogy to both physical and spiritual deterioration under the epidemic’s societal conditions would be potent, likening a “sick mind, sick heart” to “rotten daisies.”

12.  my last winter

The playlist’s first instrumental entry, it is its most musically niche and darkest manifestation of the experiences of sheer hopelessness that I want to make space for given the AIDS epidemic’s history. The track is frigid, piercing, and isolated. Whose last winter it may be, why it may be their last

winter, and the answer to the question posed in the album cover “why are you so cold?” are all left unanswered. I leave this room for interpretation to the listener, in relation to their own personal story. I feel that this is the rawest grief and lowest point of the playlist’s characterless narrative, perhaps representing the deepest cuts of loss at a partner’s bedside or of one’s own sense of self and purpose.


13.  Emile Mosseri - Jacob and the Stone | Minari (Original Motion Picture...

*Minari* is a 2020 film portraying a Korean family’s resilience in immigrating to and building a life in rural Arkansas. This is its soundtrack’s most viral piece, known for its extraordinarily bittersweet and reflective mood; it plays as the patriarch of the family, Jacob, places a stone on the ground signalling his intention to rebuild a life in Arkansas for his family despite having just lost everything. Given the grief and suffering of queer Asian love conveyed throughout the first half of the playlist down to the lowest point of the previous track, I thought that this song representing an emotional moment in the film was a fitting thematic response to that grief. We can acknowledge being at our lowest, but we simply must have the resilience to “insist upon our own existence” (in the words of Napoleon) and find strength in what truly makes a home: family, love, and unity.


14.  Laura Palmer's Theme (Instrumental)

*Twin Peaks* is an American horror mystery drama television series, focusing on the investigation of the murder of a teenage girl named Laura Palmer in the fictional town of Twin Peaks, Washington. This melancholy and bittersweet instrumental, underscored throughout by dark instrumentals, plays extensively as the murdered girl “haunts” the series. As Laura Palmer’s presence is felt for much of the series through memories, flashbacks, and dream sequences, I thought it would be an interesting analogy to Tita Aida, the gay Filipino personification of AIDS. Especially nuanced by the relationship of the LGBTQ+ community with womanhood and femininity, it represents the many complex emotions that come with (as described by Martin) this buoyant and yet tragically sardonic humanisation of the disease that similarly haunted the community. Its climax is also surprisingly

triumphant, foreshadowing the developments of hope and “light from the darkness” as the series progresses.

15.  Leith Ross - We'll Never Have Sex

Leith Ross is a trans, nonbinary, and queer Canadian indie rock singer-songwriter and guitarist. Although the importance of sexual liberation to the queer cause deserves to be highlighted and recognised, I thought that it would also be worthwhile to include a song which highlights queer love as manifested in innocence and purity, especially as part of what seems to be a broader healing process. Being with this lover manages to “Depollute me, pretty baby / Suck the rot right out of my bloodstream / Oh, dilute me, gentle angel / Water down what I call being grateful.” Even if “I said you could never touch me,” there is something straightforward yet powerful in pure and healing love which accommodates past bodily and spiritual traumas.

16.  Beabadoobee - Coffee

Beabadoobee is a British indie pop/alternative singer-songwriter who also incorporates the Original Pilipino Music of her homeland as influences in her art. Similarly to the previous track, it also depicts small moments and simple acts of service (like making someone a cup of coffee how they like it) as some of the greatest manifestations of romance.


17.  蔡依林 Jolin Tsai《親愛的對象 Untitled》Official MV | 「關於我和鬼…

Jolin Tsai is a Taiwanese musician often lauded as the “Queen of C-Pop.” She released “Untitled,” a title accompanied by the Chinese words “親愛的對象” or “Dear Lover” as a part of the soundtrack for the movie *Marry My Dead Body*. The movie follows an action-packed criminal investigation by a homophobic police officer who is unwillingly ghost-married (by a traditional Chinese custom) to the ghost of a gay man who died mysteriously. Like the movie, the song emphasises that love is love and can be uniquely meaningful regardless of labels and external expectations.


18.  mxmtoon - learn to love you (official audio)

mxmtoon is a bisexual American singer-songwriter and YouTuber of partial Chinese ancestry. One of the first non-ballads since the very beginning of


the playlist, her song is an upbeat celebration of self-love in spite of expectations; I was directly inspired for this entry by Napoleon's message of self-love, and that self-protection and love are the basis upon which new generations should be relating to and approaching issues of sex and sexuality.

19.  I Lied to You

*Sinners* is a 2025 American horror film set in 1932 Jim Crow Mississippi. It incorporates elements of mythology and supernatural magic to explore the struggles and resilience of African Americans through those struggles via powerful cultural continuity. This song specifically depicts the internal conflict of a character who is a young blues musician between his family's strict Christianity and his love for (secular) music; he lied to his father that he was being a good Christian while he was actually pursuing his true calling. The onscreen sequence that this song plays for is a pivotal moment in the movie and one of its most emotionally potent, representing the resilience of African American culture through the dance and music of both ancestral spirits and modern descendants (with even a feature of Peking Opera dancers as ancestors for the film's Chinese American store owners, paying homage to the small Asian community also present in the Mississippi Delta at the time). Overall, the song symbolises that liberation can never be attained by working within the bounds of oppressive systems and institutions, but rather via unyielding and revolutionary creativity and community. I thought that this was an important message as highlighted by Eric, Martin, and Noel, who all pointed out that the almost-nostalgia they get for the time period of the AIDS epidemic is really for the extremely powerful and resilient community they were able to build out of this unyielding love in spite of impossible struggles and conditions. It's also something important to keep in mind going into the future, as government and institutional hostility towards initiatives like DEI, medical research, and queer rights continue to grow.


20.  Outkast - Hey Ya! (Official HD Video)

Outkast were an American Southern hip-hop duo that also incorporated jazz and funk elements. The song is quite upbeat, even inviting a call-and-response from the audience (within-universe) during the song and making humorous and sexual references. However, the actual subject matter of the song is bleak, depicting a failing relationship and expressing thoughts that many romantic relationships simply last out of pressure and expectation rather than true love. I thought that this was very interestingly similar to the approaches in outreach and also general attitude undertaken by activists during the epidemic; Tala was gifted a pair of breasts in a move of solidarity via sisterhood, while Noel recounts that they had fought for the government to fund them a penis puppet for awareness, and Eric says that they would hand out red envelopes with condoms in them to promote safe sex. Even the notion of Tita Aida herself is also exactly reflective of this juxtaposition of humour and lightheartedness with very serious and saddening subject matters. I find it symbolic and very representative of the queer community and its unique approach to resistance, radical existence, and revolutionary love and community-building. I think that Gil Mangaoang succinctly captured the notion when he said that a delicate balance must be struck when figuring out how to “be true to yourself, but also seriously educate a population that needs to understand the fragility of their lives and understand how to protect them.”

21.  mxmtoon - unspoken words (official video)

The first track on mxmtoon’s debut album, this song depicts the emotional realisations of someone talking to a family member who “wasn’t allowed the same life that you’ve so gracefully endowed,” stating that recognitions of mutual love — even if they are difficult to express verbally — can be a basis for gradual bridge-building and genuinely benefit a relationship. I believe it was Jaime Geaga’s story on the *Long Distance* podcast, as well as several stories during the roundtable, that touched specifically on familial reconciliation. Although the religious and social stigma of queerness, especially in Asian American and other predominantly immigrant communities, remains strong, I remember being personally surprised at


how many of our activists actually found acceptance from their parents and family members even when coming out as gay and/or HIV-positive. I thought I would include this track to embody the importance of familial support, even if not necessarily ideal, and its organic contributions to an individual's support network especially in extremely trying times.

22.  Olivia Rodrigo - hope ur ok (Lyric Video)


Rodrigo reminisces in this track about old friends who were presumably LGBTQ+, featuring a boy whose “parents cared more about the Bible / Than being good to their own child” and a girl whose “parents hated who she loved.” Although Rodrigo has never been explicit about her sexuality and has never indicated membership of the LGBTQ+ community, her support and allyship are still expressed for people who undergo struggles of familial and self-acceptance. Similarly to the previous track, I wanted to name allies and people who allow you to truly be yourself as broader community members, and recognise such people as the foundations for queer life as Tala expressed. Rodrigo says that “I hope you know how proud I am you were created / With the courage to unlearn all of their hatred / But, God, I hope that you're happier today / 'Cause I love you / And I hope that you're okay.”

23.  The Winner Is

*Little Miss Sunshine* is a 2006 American film blending both tragedy and comedy, where a dysfunctional family must embark on a road trip for their youngest daughter to compete in a child beauty pageant. Although she does not win, this instrumental song has become viral for its optimistic tone, hopeful climax, and the inspirational anecdotes people use it to share. I was reminded of it particularly when Gil recounted being announced as a winner of a competition of sorts for having the best leather clothing in a gay bar; even within a bleaker larger situation, there can still be joy to be found in small moments and victories, and this is the basis for the optimism which makes advocacy and activism possible.

24.  Think Of Me Once In A While, Take Care

Like “Laura Palmer’s Theme,” I wanted the entire playlist to be bittersweet, joyful at times, mostly hopeful, but ultimately still stay somberly rooted in the nature of the situation at hand. Thus, harking back to Napoleon’s central question of “whether anybody gives a fuck” about what our activists went through, I wanted to include this lonely and melancholic instrumental as a true recognition of the lives that were lost and the irreversible grief felt by individuals and communities throughout the epidemic and beyond. The least we can promise these individuals is to tell their stories, think of them once in a while, and take care.

25.  try again tomorrow

Liana Flores is a Brazilian British singer-songwriter and guitarist. One of my personal favourite songs of all time, “try again tomorrow” depicts through poetic metaphor the oppressive stress of life as a whole and the impossible difficulty of coping with such. Even with love and community-building as the foundation of a movement, human beings cannot be expected to bear all of this weight, all of the time. Despite this injurious, exhausting, crushing, and often lonely passage of time, however, the message is quite clear: we can and we must always get up and try again tomorrow.