
A REVOLUTION OF THE HEART



There can be no doubt: our country – and maybe the entire world – is going through what can only be described as a revolution of the heart. Every day brings new questions about the nature of our sexual identities and the boundaries of our gender roles. Notions that had seemed fixed for centuries are now subject to exploration. Not simply what are suitable roles for men and women; those categories have been shape-shifting for decades now. But what truly makes a man a man or a woman a woman? And what about the many emerging identities between or beyond those two traditional ones? What is the meaning of marriage, and what is the true nature of family?

Given the bitterly divisive state of American life these days, what should be an open-hearted, collective search for self-creation and self-realization has often devolved instead into a grim battle, yet another explosive front in our seemingly endless culture wars. Not in my backyard has devolved into not in my bathroom – or my bedroom. Until the Supreme Court decides, no wedding cake for you. Difference is threatening and hate crimes abound.

But what about love? Is it possible, just for a moment, to reframe those charged confrontations as quests for love, as injunctions to be “bold as love,” as Jimi Hendrix put it? Or maybe just as gentle as love. Why should anyone’s personal journey pose a danger to anyone else? Why can’t we view such searches through the eyes of love? Or through the unjudging eyes of a child, as when my daughter excitedly told me that her wonderful kindergarten teacher was about to marry “his very, very, very best friend!” Or, as we attempted to arrange a get-together with one of her pals, she innocently asked, “Should I have one of her moms get in touch with you?”

Songs have addressed the many mysteries of love since words were first sung. Cole Porter asked the question best, and most simply: “What is this thing called love?” As we continue to ponder that eternal question, this splendid collection comes along to spark our thinking. The six songs on “Universal Love: Wedding

Songs Reimagined” playfully upend a convention of love songs that is so enshrined that it often escapes our notice: the use of opposite sex pronouns. With rare exceptions, love songs have rested on the assumption that a man is singing to or about a woman, and vice versa. In certain genres, like folk music, women were permitted to sing from a man’s perspective, but never the reverse. And gay songwriters have been known to avoid specific pronoun references so that “the love that dare not speak its name,” as Oscar Wilde put it, could find a voice, however muted.

But the performances here leave no doubt about the same-sex nature of the singer’s desire. Male and female singers have flipped the pronouns in “She’s Funny That Way” before, but it takes Bob Dylan to lend the song a simmering, homoerotic heat. Ben Gibbard of Death Cab for Cutie retains all the dreamy sweetness of the Beatles’ original in his “And I Love Him.” Similarly, Kele Okereke of Bloc Party places his man on the lofty pedestal the Temptations built for the gorgeous “My Guy.” Valerie June brings a delicious, elegant slow burn to the Noel Coward standard in “Mad About the Boy,” and St. Vincent finds all the adolescent wonder and excitement in her take on the Crystals in “Then She Kissed Me.” Finally, please, can someone arrange an invitation for me to the wedding of the couple that chooses Kesha’s incineration of Janis Joplin, “I Need a Woman to Love Me,” as their wedding song? That’s going to be a party!

Like desire itself in its most exquisite form, these re-imaginings of classic love songs are playful and intense, erotic and idealistic, fun, forceful and yearning. At first it may be jarring to hear these emotions expressed out loud in songs that are so familiar. But many millions of people will feel a liberation in not having to perform the psychological gymnastics required to make yourself feel included in an environment to which you have not specifically been invited. Like consent, inclusion is sexy.

These performances make clear, above all, that all are welcome to love. Often at weddings, the attending family and friends are asked to promise their support to the couple as their lives proceed beyond the festivities of the day. In their declarations to their lovers, the singers of these songs, by extension, ask a similar promise of us, their listeners. It is a promise we should honor and keep, regardless of our sexual preference. However embattled and divided our society may be, making love is always preferable to making war – and far more capable of shaping a world that welcomes us all, and that we all want to live in.

– Anthony DeCurtis

SIDE A

1. Bob Dylan – He’s Funny That Way 3:30 Written by Richard Whiting and Neil Moret © 1928, Warner/Chappell Music Publishing (BMI) and EMI April Music Inc © 2018 Columbia Records, a division of Sony Music Entertainment

2. St. Vincent – And Then She Kissed Me 2:06 Written by Jeff Barry, Ellie Greenwich, and Phil Spector © 1963, ABKCO Music (BMI), Universal Songs of Polygram Intl., Inc. (BMI) Mother Bertha Music (BMI), and Trio Music Company (BMI) © 2018 Loma Vista Recordings. Distributed by Concord Music Group, Inc.

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Mixed by
Recorded and Mixed at
Mastered by

Thomas Bartlett and St. Vincent
Thomas Bartlett
Patrick Dillett
Reservoir Studios, NYC
Chris Gehringer at
Sterling Sound

3. Kele Okereke – My Guy 2:55 Written by Smokey Robinson and Ronald White © 1964, Jobete Music Co Inc.

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Engineered by
Recorded September 2017 at
Mastered by

Gethin Pearson
Matt Ingram
Urchin Studio, London
Nigel Walton

SIDE B

1. Valerie June – Mad About The Girl 3:12 Written by Noel Coward © 1932, Warner/Chappell Music Publishing (ASCAP) © 2018 June Tunes Music, Inc. under exclusive license to Concord Records, a division of Concord Music Group, Inc.

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Alex Fulton
The Village Studio, LA, CA
Storefront Music, NY, NY
Fred Kervorkian

2. Benjamin Gibbard – And I Love Him 2:43 Written by John Lennon and Paul McCartney © 1964, Sony/ATV Tunes LLC © 2018 WIACF LLC

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Benjamin Gibbard
Steve Fisk
Mark Wilder
Computerworld, Seattle, WA

3. Kesha – I Need A Woman To Love 4:29 Based on “I Need a Man to Love” by Sam Andrew and Janis Joplin, originally performed by Big Brother & the Holding Co. © 1968 , Cheap Thrills Music (ASCAP), Strong Arm Music (ASCAP) © 2018 Kemosabe Records

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