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MUSICAL AIDS: MUSIC, MUSICIANS, AND THE CULTURAL
CONSTRUCTION OF HIV/AIDS IN THE UNITED STATES

by

Matthew Christen Tift

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to Marnie

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Abstract

MUSICAL AIDS: MUSIC, MUSICIANS, AND THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF HIV/AIDS IN THE UNITED STATES

Matthew Christen Tift

Under the supervision of Professor Susan C. Cook

At the University of Wisconsin-Madison

During the 1980s and 1990s, creative people represented HIV/AIDS through various media. The public watched the AIDS Quilt unfold in Washington, D.C. five times between 1987 and 1996, many attended at least one film about AIDS, *Philadelphia* (1993), and they started going to the AIDS-themed rock musical *Rent* on Broadway in 1996. Those events, along with people such as Rock Hudson, Ryan White, Magic Johnson, Greg Louganis, and Arthur Ashe – not to mention a little red ribbon – came to symbolize AIDS. These are a few of the events and individuals that have usually attracted the attention of the media and scholars alike. Cultural critics, including Susan Sontag, Paula Treichler, Douglas Crimp, and many others, have argued that language and culture shape the public understanding of AIDS. Nevertheless, music has been missing from these narratives, and musical responses to AIDS have been conspicuously absent from the work of music scholars.

This dissertation examines nationally recognized, AIDS-themed music in the United States between 1990 and 1996. This project focuses on three contrasting musical works: John Corigliano's Symphony no. 1 (1989), TLC's hip-hop song "Waterfalls" (1994), and the Red Hot Organization's AIDS benefit rap album *America Is Dying Slowly*

(1996). Considering issues of race, gender, and sexuality, in addition to tonality, form, lyrics, and melody, this study contrasts the confrontational techniques favored by AIDS activists, such as the members of ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), with the less invasive music produced by Corigliano, TLC, and the Red Hot Organization. Further scrutiny reveals the variety of musical and programmatic techniques that musicians and composers have used to convey ideas about AIDS and participate in the cultural construction of AIDS, often giving their music an AIDS context without lyrics that explicitly refer to HIV or AIDS. The variety of musical examples explored in this study exposes previously unrecognized responses to this devastating virus, and demonstrates the need for further participation by musicians and scholars as the epidemic nears the end of its third decade.

Abbreviations

ACT UP	AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ARC	AIDS-Related Complex
ASO	AIDS Service Organization
AZT	Zidovudine or Azidothymidine
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
GRID	Gay-Related Immune Deficiency
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PSA	Public Service Announcement
PWA	Person (Living) with AIDS

Introduction

Musical Responses to HIV/AIDS in the United States

For those who are not personally involved in HIV prevention or treatment, AIDS can be downright confusing. Many people are uncomfortable talking about AIDS because it is largely a sexual disease, spread only through semen, vaginal fluid, blood, and breast milk. During the first decade of AIDS, scientists informally described AIDS as the “gay plague” and then formally called it GRID (gay-related immune deficiency) and ARC (AIDS-related complex).¹ In the early 1980s the groups thought to be most at risk for AIDS infection were the “4-H’s”: homosexuals, heroin users, hemophiliacs, and Haitians.² The CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) now understands that HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is the virus that causes AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome), although the CDC has changed the definition of AIDS several times.³

¹ See, for example, Abraham Karpas et al, “Polymerase Chain Reaction Evidence for Human Immunodeficiency Virus 1 Neutralization by Passive Immunization in Patients with AIDS and AIDS-Related Complex,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 87 (1990): 7613-7; and F. Laure et al, “Hepatitis B Virus DNA Sequences in Lymphoid Cells from Patients with AIDS and AIDS-Related Complex,” *Science* 229 (1985): 561-3.

² The idea of the “4 H’s” first appeared in Michael S. Gottlieb and Jerome E. Groopman, eds., *Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome: Proceedings of a Schering Corp.-UCLA Symposium Held in Park City, Utah, February 5-10, 1984* (New York: A.R. Liss, 1984).

³ The CDC first started using the term AIDS in Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Update on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) – United

The public perception of AIDS, too, has evolved over time. It changed drastically when AIDS took Rock Hudson's life in 1985 and again when Ryan White died from AIDS in 1990. It changed when Magic Johnson announced his HIV-positive serostatus in 1991 and each time the NAMES Project displayed the AIDS Quilt on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.⁴ In addition to the biological and biomedical AIDS epidemic, there has existed, in the words of the feminist scholar Paula Treichler, an "epidemic of signification."⁵ There is an ongoing struggle over how we experience AIDS and how we understand it. The sites of this negotiation are not limited to the books, newspapers, magazines, and television – performing and listening to music also contribute to this changing landscape.

The CDC does not give musicians much credit for shaping ideas about AIDS, instead leaving the work of AIDS education to doctors, case managers, prevention

States," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 31 (1982): 507-8, 513-14. They revised the case definition in the following reports: CDC, "1993 Revised Classification System for HIV Infection and Expanded Surveillance Case Definition for AIDS among Adolescents and Adults," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 41 (1992): 1-19; CDC, "Current Trends: Revision of the Case Definition of Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome for National Reporting-United States," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 34 (1985): 373-5; and CDC, "Revision of the CDC Surveillance Case Definition for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 36 (1987): 1S-15S.

⁴ The NAMES Project displayed the entire AIDS Quilt in 1987, 1988, 1989, 1992 and 1996.

⁵ Paula A. Treichler, "AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification," in *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999).

specialists, AIDS activists, and others. However, music has the power to affect the perception of AIDS and how people behave. AIDS benefit CDs, AIDS benefit concerts, HIV-positive composers and musicians, and musical responses to AIDS all affect the AIDS epidemic. Musical works – including symphonies, chart-topping popular music, rap, and other genres – all have the potential to articulate ideas about AIDS. Or, to borrow a phrase from the literary critic Jane Tompkins, musical works have the power to do “cultural work” by reshaping the context of AIDS – “they offer powerful examples of the way culture thinks about itself, articulating and proposing solutions for the problems that shape a particular historical moment.”⁶

Scholars who do cultural research on AIDS have explored AIDS works that do cultural work at multiple sites, from the local to the national. For example, Paula Treicher wrote about the influence of media, television, gender, and many other subjects that inform how we understand AIDS.⁷ Susan Sontag’s landmark book, *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, discussed the language of AIDS.⁸ Douglas Crimp, an AIDS activist and MIT art critic, has written about AIDS in sports, arts exhibits, movies, alternative media, and

⁶ Jane P. Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), xi.

⁷ Most of her essays concerning AIDS can be found in Paula A. Treichler, *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999).

⁸ Susan Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989).

other art forms.⁹ Marita Sturken investigated how the AIDS Quilt affected cultural memory.¹⁰ There have been many other important contributions to this field, including David Gere's examination of dance, Alexandra Juhasz's look at alternative media, and David Román's discussion of performance.¹¹ Each of these scholars has shown how a wide variety of artistic media influence ideas about AIDS.

These cultural analysts have scrutinized and interpreted a broad range of American cultural phenomena, but few scholars have looked closely at the sonic dimension of the AIDS epidemic – the American music that affects the social dimension.¹² Deliberately or not, most cultural work concerning AIDS ignores the role of music in shaping how the general public, media, governments, and others understand the AIDS epidemic. For example, Treichler acknowledges that in the media's treatment of

⁹ Many of his essays concerning AIDS were reproduced in Douglas Crimp, *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002).

¹⁰ Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

¹¹ David Gere, *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic: Tracking Choreography in the Age of AIDS* (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004); Alexandra Juhasz, *AIDS TV: Identity, Community, and Alternative Video* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995); and David Román, *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

¹² While “America” can include North America, Central America, South America, the Caribbean, and associated regions, in this project I am focusing on music embraced by audiences in the United States.

AIDS there is “background music that telegraphs significance.”¹³ Treichler recognizes that music affects perception, but in her assessment its significance is literally and figuratively restricted to the background. In Marita Sturken’s deft 1997 study of the AIDS Quilt, she considers quilting, movies, war memorials, media, activism, art, but never mentions the *AIDS Quilt Songbook* (1992), a patchwork of fifteen songs concerning AIDS that now includes works from New York, Minnesota, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and elsewhere.¹⁴ Even in David Gere’s excellent study of AIDS and dance, where one might expect music to play a crucial role, Gere mostly describes music as part of the backdrop and not central to performances.¹⁵ These examples do not indicate flawed work, but rather they highlight the fact that cultural critics have focused on the creations of photographers, actors, dancers, artists, curators, activists, journalists, and others –

¹³ Treichler, *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic*, 130.

¹⁴ Sturken, *Tangled Memories*. For more on the songs in the AIDS Quilt Songbook, see the Music Archive of the Estate Project for Artists with AIDS at www.artistswithaids.org. See also Kyle Wayne Ferrill, “William Parker and the AIDS Quilt Songbook” (DMA, Florida State University, 2005).

¹⁵ The pamphlet “How to Have Sex in an Epidemic” appeared in 1983 and numerous scholars, including Gere, have since adapted the title. See Richard Berkowitz and Michael Callen, *How to Have Sex in an Epidemic: One Approach*, Pamphlet (New York: News from the Front Publications, 1983); Douglas Crimp, “How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic,” in *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987); Gere, *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic*; Treichler, *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic*; and Simon Watney, “How to Have Sax in an Epidemic,” in *Imagine Hope: AIDS and Gay Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

rather than musicians – to describe how the arts participate in the cultural construction of AIDS.

Musicals and movie-musicals attract slightly more attention. Perhaps the most often-performed music with an AIDS context would be songs such as “One Song Glory” and “Life Support” from the Tony and Pulitzer Prize-winning “rock musical” *Rent* (the musical premiered in 1996 and director Chris Columbus made it a movie-musical in 2005). Based on Giacomo Puccini’s opera *La bohème* (1896), *Rent* concerns a group of struggling Bohemians, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered individuals, living in New York City’s East Village, and most of the main characters are HIV positive.¹⁶ A related example is John Greyson’s *Zero Patience* (1993), a humorous movie-musical that critiques Randy Shilts’s representation of “Patient Zero” in *And the Band Played On* (discussed below). While most scholars focus on the more eccentric aspects of Greyson’s film – such as the bizarre pair of singing assholes and Michael Callen’s personification of HIV¹⁷ – Robert L. Cagle and Christopher Gittings both

¹⁶ This is small sample of the literature concerning the musical: Michael Giltz, “Rent Gets Real,” *Advocate*, 8 November 2005; Sarah Schulman, *Stagestruck: Theater, AIDS, and the Marketing of Gay America*, (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998); Judith Sebesta, “Of Fire, Death, and Desire: Transgression and Carnival in Jonathan Larson’s *Rent*,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 16 (2006): 419-38; and Scott Warfield, “From Hair to Rent: Is Rock a Four-Letter Word on Broadway?” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical*, ed. William A. Everett and Paul R. Laird (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁷ Greyson said that it took a great deal of ingenuity to make it look like two anuses were actually singing (lecture in Madison, Wisc. on April 5, 2005). In the scene with Callen’s personification of HIV, Patient Zero looks at his blood cells in a

acknowledged the importance of the songs in Greyson's film to its representation of AIDS.¹⁸ Clearly the music in both of these movie-musicals amplifies the messages in the text. Nonetheless, the present study concerns musical responses to HIV/AIDS, and while these two musicals are fascinating, this project concentrates on songs and symphonies rather than musicals.

While one might expect non-musicians to avoid discussing the music of the AIDS epidemic, it is surprising that musicologists – especially those who align their work with contemporary American cultural studies – rarely discuss AIDS as a musical phenomenon in their scholarly publications. The past few decades are a relatively under-explored time period for musicologists, but it is nonetheless surprising that few music scholars have acknowledged, let alone explored, the interaction between music and AIDS.¹⁹ Most

microscope. Actors on inner tubes and flippers play the blood cells. Michael Callen (who is a musician, writer, and the founder of the People With AIDS Coalition) is dressed in drag and plays "Miss HIV."

¹⁸ Robert L. Cagle, "'Tell the Story of My Life . . .': The Making of Meaning, 'Monsters', and Music in John Greyson's *Zero Patience*," *Velvet Light Trap* 35 (1995): 69-81; and Christopher Gittings, "'Zero Patience,' Genre, Difference, and Ideology: Singing and Dancing Queer Nation," *Cinema Journal* 41 (2001): 28-39.

¹⁹ Why musicologists avoid writing about AIDS is a much more complicated – and sensitive – issue. In 1997 Susan McClary wrote, "Even music academics have balked at addressing this issue [AIDS]: a meeting of the program committee for one of our societies broke down in insults and tears last year over a proposed session on AIDS-related pieces." Susan McClary, review of *Opera: Desire, Disease, Death*, by Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 50 (1997): 175-81. Additionally, to this date, no major music conference has hosted a session devoted to American music with an AIDS context.

musicological work has a strong historical component, but it is also in dialogue with the present. Musicologists frequently discuss race, gender, sexuality, and class in their writings concerning contemporary music, so AIDS is a natural extension of this work because it affects all races, genders, and classes of people, and has a growing international dimension. Literature concerning contemporary music in scholarly music journals and books rarely mentions AIDS. For example, there are only a few articles in *Popular Music* and *American Music* (both journals contain articles on the subject of contemporary music) that contain the letters HIV or AIDS.²⁰ In fact, pianist Keith Ward's review of two albums of musical responses to AIDS is the only article (and technically it is a "review") in a peer-reviewed music journal that concentrates explicitly on music composed in response to HIV/AIDS.²¹

The most extensive scholarly article concerning a broad range of AIDS-themed music, "Musical Responses to HIV and AIDS" (1998), is also by Keith Ward, and it concerns a few compositions from *The AIDS Quilt Songbook*.²² His essay documented

²⁰ There are some exceptions: Barbara Bradby, "Sampling Sexuality: Gender, Technology and the Body in Dance Music," *Popular Music* 12 (1993): 164; Krin Gabbard, "Race and Reappropriation: Spike Lee Meets Aaron Copland," *American Music* 18 (2000): 385; and Perl Shamsai, "Rock, Rap and Ruckus at the Grammys," *Popular Music* 15 (1996): 368.

²¹ Keith C. Ward, review of *And Trouble Came: Musical Responses to AIDS* and *The AIDS Quilt Songbook*, *American Music* 3 (1998): 351-6.

²² Keith C. Ward, "Musical Responses to HIV and AIDS," in *Perspectives on American Music since 1950*, ed. James R. Heintze (New York: Garland, 1999).

“the connection between the inherent musical value of AIDS-inspired art and its social intent.”²³ One of the underlying messages in Ward’s work is that musical responses to AIDS are beneficial and helpful. He cites numerous musical works composed in response to the AIDS epidemic, and he does an excellent job situating *The AIDS Quilt Songbook* within the context of other AIDS-related music. A broad range of scholars influenced Ward’s work, including many of the cultural scholars cited above.²⁴

Studies of non-Western musical responses to AIDS are slightly more common. The leading scholar in this area is ethnomusicologist Gregory Barz, an associate professor at Vanderbilt University: Barz has numerous lectures and articles about musical responses to AIDS to his credit; he hosted a session concerning AIDS and music in Africa at the 2005 meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology; and he recently published a book about AIDS and music in Uganda.²⁵ Barz has shown how important music is to HIV prevention. Nonetheless, music, drama, and dance are a much more

²³ Ward, “Musical Responses to HIV and AIDS,” 326.

²⁴ I found this essay very helpful when I first started looking at musical responses to AIDS. Although Ward is no longer doing work in this area, he has continued to promote musical responses to HIV/AIDS as a performer (personal communication, 30 November 2004).

²⁵ See, for example, Gregory Barz, “No One Will Listen to Us Unless We Bring Our Drums! AIDS and Women’s Music Performance in Uganda,” in *The aWAKE Project: Uniting against the African AIDS Crisis* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002); Barz, “Why Saving Africa from Grips of AIDS, Debt Is Important to Americans,” *Tennessean*, 3 June 2002; and Barz, *Singing for Life: HIV/AIDS and Music in Uganda* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

integral part of AIDS treatment and AIDS awareness efforts in sub-Saharan Africa than they are in the United States.

The current project explores the musical dimensions of the AIDS epidemic in the United States, taking into account elements of musical style, lyrics, biographical information, reception history, race, and gender. This study examines AIDS-related music, but it is not meant to be a typology of musical responses to HIV/AIDS. It centers on chosen musical works from the period in which the cultural and musical construction of AIDS changed most dramatically: from 1990, when AIDS first became known as a chronic disease (instead of a plague), to 1996, when people with AIDS started taking protease inhibitors, thus causing the first decline in AIDS deaths in the United States.²⁶ This period saw the first major film about AIDS, *Philadelphia* (1993), and the last display of the AIDS Quilt (1996).²⁷ During this period Magic Johnson and Greg Louganis both announced their HIV-positive serostatus (in 1991 and 1995, respectively), and AIDS

²⁶ For more on the period around 1990, see Daniel M. Fox, “The Politics of HIV Infection: 1989-1990 as Years of Change,” in *AIDS: The Making of a Chronic Disease*, ed. Elizabeth Fee and Daniel M. Fox (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 125-43. For additional information concerning on the dramatic decrease in deaths in 1996, see Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Update: Trends in AIDS Incidence – United States, 1996,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 46, no. 37 (1997): 861-7.

²⁷ Some reviewers, such as Roger Ebert, enjoyed *Philadelphia* (see Ebert, “Practicing Safe Moviemaking: Despite Conservative Approach, ‘Philadelphia’ Is Potent,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, 14 January 1994). While other reviewers were disparaging, the illustrious AIDS activist Larry Kramer produced the film’s most scathing review in “Lying About the Gay ‘90s: An AIDS Activist Says ‘Philadelphia’ Is Worse Than No Film at All,” *Washington Post*, 9 January 1994.

took the lives of Ryan White (1990), Arthur Ashe (1993), and millions of others worldwide. Two popular musicians died during this period: Freddie Mercury's death from AIDS in 1991 sent "a shock wave" through the popular music industry,²⁸ and Eazy-E (Eric Wright), founder of the original gangsta rap group NWA (Niggaz with Attitude), sobered the hip-hop world when he died from AIDS in 1995.²⁹ This period ended around the time that Andrew Sullivan published a controversial article regarding the "end" of AIDS in the *New York Times Magazine*.³⁰

Musical responses to HIV/AIDS blossomed in the early 1990s. As Keith Ward notes, "Initially, the public musical response to this pandemic was silence. Whether out of fear, denial, stigmatization, or shock, musicians were mostly mute during the initial stage of the pandemic in the early 1980s."³¹ Musical responses to AIDS lagged far behind other artistic responses to HIV/AIDS that occurred almost immediately after the first reported cases of AIDS in the early 1980s.³² By the 1990s music and musicians became a

²⁸ Wayne Hoffman, "AIDS and the Music Industry: Caring at a Crossroads," *Billboard*, 10 November 2001.

²⁹ See Renee Graham, "AIDS Death Jars Rap World," *Boston Globe*, 28 March 1995.

³⁰ Andrew Sullivan, "When Plagues End: Notes on the Twilight of an Epidemic," *New York Times Magazine*, 10 November 1996.

³¹ Ward, "Musical Responses to HIV and AIDS," 326.

³² For examples and analyses of early literary and artistic responses to HIV/AIDS see, for example, Robert Atkins and Thomas W. Sokolowski, eds., *From Media to Metaphor: Art About AIDS* (New York: Independent Curators, 1991); Rob Baker, *The Art*

more audible component of the cultural response to AIDS, and this study considers the reasons behind the emergence of nationally recognized, AIDS-themed music in the early 1990s and the relative decline after the middle of the decade.

The manner in which musicians construct AIDS in their music in turn influences how AIDS affects individuals. American music influences how people live their lives, how lawmakers enact legislation, who receives funding for research, how AIDS educators determine the content of their education campaigns, and how parents teach their children about sexuality – the realities of living in the time of AIDS. Whatever its effect, most people agree that music does *something*. For example, one study of African-American adolescent females concluded that exposure to rap music videos, especially gangsta rap videos, influences sexual risk behaviors and STD infection.³³ In their study of “innovative” HIV/AIDS prevention efforts, researchers at the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University (Atlanta, Ga.) found that “the overall implications of using

of AIDS (New York: Continuum, 1994); Ted Gott, *Don't Leave Me This Way: Art in the Age of AIDS* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1994); Marie Howe and Michael Klein, eds., *In the Company of My Solitude: American Writing from the AIDS Pandemic* (New York: Persea Books, 1995); Michael Klein, ed., *Poets for Life: Seventy-Six Poets Respond to AIDS* (New York: Crown, 1989); James Miller, *Fluid Exchanges: Artists and Critics in the AIDS Crisis* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 1992); and Emmanuel S. Nelson, ed., *AIDS: The Literary Response* (New York: Twayne, 1992).

³³ Gina M. Wingood et al, “A Prospective Study of Exposure to Rap Music Videos and African American Female Adolescents’ Health,” *American Journal of Public Health* 93 (2003): 437-9.

hip-hop music in health promotion are unlimited.”³⁴ A group of sociologists from the University of Houston found that rock music has potential value as a means for AIDS intervention.³⁵ Departments of health have acknowledged the power of music in shaping perceptions about AIDS by using music in HIV prevention campaigns.³⁶ Even *Cosmopolitan* magazine suggests how people can use music during the AIDS epidemic: as a substitute for sex.³⁷ Nobody can know precisely what music *does*, so this study will focus on what music might *say*. Just as there are few certainties in the AIDS epidemic, there is no prototypical musical response to AIDS to which all others must aspire. Thus, this study examines how a handful of musicians have helped contribute to the ideological, social, and personal realities of AIDS.

This project focuses on musical works between 1990 and 1996, but Chapter 1, “AIDS in the 1980s: Education, Memorials, and Activism,” supplies greater detail about

³⁴ Torrance Stephens, Ronald L. Braithwaite, and Sandra E. Taylor, “Model for Using Hip-Hop Music for Small Group HIV/AIDS Prevention Counseling with African American Adolescents and Young Adults,” *Patient Education and Counseling* 35 (1998): 127-37. See also Steven C. Martino et al, “Exposure to Degrading Versus Nondegrading Music Lyrics and Sexual Behavior among Youth,” *Pediatrics* 118 (2006): E430-E41.

³⁵ Joseph A. Kotarba, Mark L. Williams, and Jay Johnson, “Rock Music as a Medium for AIDS Intervention,” *AIDS Education and Prevention* 3 (1991): 47-9.

³⁶ For example, the Wisconsin Division of Public Health began an HIV testing media campaign in 2001 that used three different songs (Radio PSAs). For more details, see dhfs.wisconsin.gov/aids-hiv.

³⁷ B. Gardner, “Would You Believe Heavy Petting, Masturbation, Vibrators, Hot Music, and Other Passionate Play Toys – All Pinch Hitting for Bedding New Partners in the Age of AIDS!” *Cosmopolitan*, April 1988.

many of the cultural issues already mentioned above and provides a rudimentary overview of a few key events leading up to the end of the 1980s that most greatly affected ideas about AIDS. The people discussed in Chapter 1, such as Ronald Reagan, Rock Hudson, Randy Shilts, and Ryan White, significantly impacted how the general public understood AIDS in the 1990s. Chapters 2-4 are case studies that examine the interplay between American music and AIDS at three separate historical moments, in three different musical genres, with three distinct kinds of audiences.

Chapter 2, “‘Those Friends that I Have Lost’: John Corigliano’s Symphony no. 1 and the Instrumental Construction of AIDS,” examines Corigliano’s symphony in the context of “the new romanticism.” It considers how Corigliano introduced HIV prevention messages and memorialized his friends within the confines of the “high” cultural symphonic traditions, and how his symphony became one of the most frequently performed American symphonies in recent history.

Chapter 3, “Positive Music: Race, Gender, and AIDS in TLC’s ‘Waterfalls,’” focuses on a song that appeared the year after the blockbuster hit movie, *Philadelphia* (1993). “Waterfalls” and *Philadelphia* both symbolized the growing cultural acceptance of AIDS in the United States. Although 1994 saw the releases of numerous musical responses to HIV/AIDS – including Laurie Anderson’s “Tightrope,” Reba McEntire’s “She Thinks His Name Was John,” and Ween’s “The HIV Song” – this chapter considers “Waterfalls” in connection with four other songs with an AIDS context that were on the *Billboard* charts in the 1990s: U2’s “One” (1991), Elton John’s “The Last Song” (1992), Janet Jackson’s “Together Again” (1997), and Liz Phair’s “Ride” (1998). Two of these

four songs appeared before “Waterfalls” and two of them came after “Waterfalls,” but none of them specifically mentioned HIV/AIDS in the text; thus, this chapter examines the importance of their extra-musical references to AIDS. Chapter 3 argues that “Waterfalls” should be understood as a type of community-level intervention, something that helped introduce the black female voice into the public discourse concerning AIDS.

Chapter 4, “Acoustic Contagion or Acoustic Prevention? *America Is Dying Slowly*, Gangsta Rap, and AIDS,” considers the Red Hot Organization’s 1996 rap album *America Is Dying Slowly*, released the year after rapper Eazy-E died from AIDS. This album draws attention to a conflict: the Red Hot Organization, an organization that attempts to “raise funds and awareness to fight AIDS through pop culture,” released the album, but all of the songs on *America Is Dying Slowly* are by men and most of them place the blame for the spread of AIDS on women. This album articulated HIV prevention messages within the constraints of certain hip-hop practices. The musicians did not omit the customary references to “bitches” and “hoes,” and some of them discussed AIDS in a straightforward manner. This chapter contemplates the importance of these unfiltered messages about AIDS.

Chapter 5, “‘When Plagues End’: Musical Responses to AIDS since 1996,” discusses the impact of protease inhibitors on AIDS consciousness and the influence of the 1996 Telecommunications Act on musical expression. This chapter considers one of the most ambitious musical responses to HIV/AIDS – an album by “Artists Against AIDS Worldwide” entitled *What’s Going On*. Led by U2’s Bono, the more than thirty popular musicians that comprised “Artists Against AIDS Worldwide” produced an album

that symbolized the changing times. This chapter considers how American musical responses have evolved since the early 1990s and examines three regional examples: Dan Bern's "Cure for AIDS" (1998), Bob Rivers's "Hello, I Love You (Let's Get Tested)" (1997), and a classical/art music concert that I helped produce in 2004. This final chapter suggests which kinds of musical responses to AIDS may be the most effective in promoting change.

Drawing on theoretical models from a variety of fields – including historical musicology, feminist theory, critical theory, and queer studies – this project focuses on a small number of works from a relatively short period of time (1990-96). It features some of the most popular, best-selling, and best-known music with an HIV/AIDS context in the United States in the early 1990s. As a whole, musicians made more albums with an AIDS context and performed more concerts in the name of AIDS in the first part of the 1990s than during any other period in the relatively brief history of AIDS (since about 1981). However, the events that transpired in the 1980s (i.e., the first decade of AIDS) influenced everything that musicians accomplished in the early part of the 1990s and, accordingly, this study begins in the 1980s.

Chapter 1

AIDS in the 1980s: Education, Memorials, and Activism

On June 5, 1981 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published the first report on the epidemic in the United States in their weekly newsletter.¹ This report in the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* described the deaths of five gay men in Los Angeles from *Pneumocystis carinii*, a rare pneumonia. As the CDC received more and more reports of deaths among gay men, the syndrome informally became known as “the gay plague” or GRID. By 1982 not all cases were “gay related” and the CDC dropped term GRID in favor of AIDS.² In the early years of AIDS – a period of rampant homophobia – conservative leaders such as Jesse Helms, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Buchanan openly described AIDS as the punishment for a gay lifestyle. Falwell reasoned, “AIDS is God’s judgment of a society that does not live by His rules.”³ In 1983 Buchanan remarked, “The poor homosexuals – they have declared war against nature, and now nature is extracting an awful retribution.”⁴

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “*Pneumocystis* Pneumonia: Los Angeles,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 30 (1981): 1-3.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Update on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) – United States,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 31 (1982): 513-4.

³ Quoted in Douglas Crimp, *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 35.

⁴ Quoted in David Jefferson and Ramin Setoodeh, “How AIDS Changed America,” *Newsweek*, 15 May 2006, 37.

Ryan White, an Indiana teenager with hemophilia, again challenged the construction of AIDS as “gay related” when he drew worldwide attention after doctors diagnosed him with AIDS on December 17, 1984. Twice a week White had been receiving a blood product, known as Factor VIII, containing clotting agents that were supposed to help with his hemophilia, but he became HIV-positive through an infected dose. The media portrayed White, a heterosexual boy, as an “innocent victim” – unlike gay men. White’s story attracted the attention of celebrities, particularly musicians such as Elton John and Michael Jackson. Jackson bought a home for White and his family and dedicated the song “Gone Too Soon” (1991) to him.⁵ Ryan White died of AIDS on April 8, 1990 at age eighteen.⁶

The year after White’s diagnosis, 1985, marked a significant change in the history of AIDS. In July 1985 Rock Hudson, an icon of Hollywood masculinity, acknowledged that he had AIDS, and on October 2, 1985 he died of AIDS. His announcement provoked questions about those at risk and caused a sharp increase in the sheer number of news stories about AIDS.⁷ A couple of years later, in his award-winning book *And the Band*

⁵ See, for example, Edna Gundersen, “Jackson More Slick Than ‘Dangerous,’” *USA Today*, 22 November 1991; and Richard Harrington, “Jackson’s ‘Dangerous’ Departures: Stylistic Shifts Mar His First Album in Four Years,” *Washington Post*, 24 November 1991.

⁶ For more on Ryan White, see Ryan White and Ann Marie Cunningham, *Ryan White: My Own Story* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991).

⁷ Deborah Lupton, *Moral Threats and Dangerous Desires: AIDS in the News Media* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1994), 14.

Played On, the journalist Randy Shilts would write, “there were two clear phases to the disease in the United States: there was AIDS before Rock Hudson and there was AIDS after.”⁸

Throughout the 1980s some doctors, politicians, journalists, and others struggled with questions regarding how to best treat people with AIDS. In 1986 William Buckley caused an uproar when he suggested in the *New York Times*, “everyone detected with AIDS should be tattooed in the upper forearm, to protect common-needle users, and in the buttocks, to prevent the victimization of other homosexuals.”⁹ Although Buckley’s article received much negative attention, these types of calls for branding or quarantine were common among political and social conservatives. For example, Senator Jesse Helms once remarked, “The logical outcome of testing is a quarantine of those infected,” and several states even considered legislation to do just that.¹⁰ This variety of

⁸ Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), 585. 1985 also saw the performance of the first AIDS play, Larry Kramer’s *The Normal Heart*. Kramer’s play, about the epidemic in New York City, challenged the traditional idea of “normalcy.”

⁹ William F. Buckley, Jr., “Crucial Steps in Combating the AIDS Epidemic: Identify All the Carriers,” *New York Times*, 18 March 1986.

¹⁰ Helms’s statement comes from Crimp, *Melancholia*, 35. For more on the legislation, see Daniel M. Fox, “AIDS and the American Health Polity: The History and Prospects of a Crisis of Authority,” *Milbank Quarterly* 64 (1986): 20. Also, California voters rejected a ballot initiative on 4 November 1986 that would have required HIV-positive individuals to report their serostatus to California’s Department of Health – for more on this, see Jay M. Kohorn, “Petition for Extraordinary Relief: If the Larouche AIDS Initiative Had Passed in California,” *New York University Review of Law and Social Change* 15 (1987): 477-512.

demagoguery did nothing to stop the spread of AIDS, and it certainly encouraged hatred. As noted by many at the time, the sentiment embodied in such statements sounded remarkably similar to the National Socialist badge system used to identify criminals, Jews, gay males, and others.

Even during these disturbing calls for quarantine and tattooing, the President of the United States seemed oblivious to the AIDS epidemic. The epidemic had been devastating communities since 1981, but in the first half of the decade President Ronald Reagan only uttered the word “AIDS” in public a few times.¹¹ In 1985, Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Los Angeles) wrote:

It is surprising that the president could remain silent as 6,000 Americans died, that he could fail to acknowledge the epidemic’s existence. Perhaps his staff felt he had to, since many of his New Right supporters have raised money by campaigning against homosexuals.¹²

On April 1, 1987 Reagan finally ended his silence and gave his first speech about the AIDS epidemic.¹³ People who watched their loved ones die and people who were dying

¹¹ See, for example, Marlene Cimon, “Health Experts Glad Reagan Cited AIDS: Pleased by Attention, Disappointed He Did Not Quell School Fear,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 September 1985.

¹² Henry A. Waxman, “Fighting an Epidemic in the Absence of Leadership,” *Washington Post*, 4 September 1985.

¹³ Treichler, *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic*, 57. There are numerous articles concerning Reagan’s first speech about AIDS, including Philip Boffey, “Reagan Urges Wide AIDS Testing but Does Not Call for Compulsion,” *New York Times*, 1 June 1987; Nancy Dunne, “Reagan Sees AIDS as ‘Enemy Number 1,’” *Financial Times* (London), 2 April 1987; and “Mr. Reagan on AIDS,” *Washington Post*, 2 June 1987.

themselves must have felt deeply troubled by Reagan's refusal to deal with AIDS publicly. Because Reagan intentionally remained silent about AIDS, he caused one of the biggest public health failures in modern memory and directly contributed to the rapid spread of HIV.

Just a few months after Reagan ended his silence, Randy Shilts published a book that would become one the most influential assessments of AIDS, his 630-page, *New York Times* best-selling book, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic*.¹⁴ Other writers wrote histories of the AIDS epidemic before Shilts – Dennis Altman, for example, published *AIDS in the Mind of America* just a year before¹⁵ – but Shilts wrote an “unequaled classic” that received extensive media attention.¹⁶ Shilts's well-researched book contained a wealth of information about the early years of the AIDS epidemic, but its central thesis could be summed up in one sentence: “The bitter truth was that AIDS did not just happen to America – it was allowed to happen.”¹⁷ Shilts's book focused on the many institutions that failed to do anything substantial to stop the spread of AIDS. He convincingly described the lackadaisical governmental response to AIDS, and his book won numerous awards, including the Stonewall Book

¹⁴ Shilts, *And the Band Played On*.

¹⁵ Dennis Altman, *AIDS in the Mind of America* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1986).

¹⁶ Patricia Siplon, “A Brief History of the Political Science of AIDS Activism,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 32 (1999): 578.

¹⁷ Shilts, *And the Band Played On*, xxii.

Award in 1988, an award sponsored by the American Library Association's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Round Table.¹⁸

Although Shilts wrote a compelling and thoroughly documented book, he relied on the controversial argument that a single gay man, Gaetan Dugas – who Shilts putatively labeled “Patient Zero” – brought AIDS to the United States. Shilts connected Dugas, a Canadian flight attendant, to many of the men with the first documented cases of AIDS. Shilts wrote:

His role [Dugas's] truly was remarkable. At least 40 of the first 248 gay men diagnosed with GRID [Gay-Related Immune Deficiency] in the United States, as of April 12, 1982, either had had sex with Gaetan Dugas or had had sex with someone who had.¹⁹

Shilts's focus on Dugas throughout the book provided a scapegoat for the AIDS epidemic in the United States by highlighting Dugas's promiscuity. William Darrow of the Centers for Disease Control had used the term “Patient [letter] O”²⁰ well before Shilts used

¹⁸ The title that Shilts chose played off the title of the popular late-nineteenth-century song by Charles B. Ward and John F. Palmer, “The Band Played On” (New York Music Co., 1895). Nonetheless, according to Shilts, the book did not have much to do with the song – he viewed the title as “simply a snappier way of saying ‘business as usual’” (see Margaret Engel, “AIDS and Prejudice: One Reporter's Account of the Nation's Response,” *Washington Post*, 1 December 1987).

¹⁹ Shilts, *And the Band Played On*, 147.

²⁰ In the original study Auerbach and Darrow used the term “Patient O” for “Out of California,” but numerous reporters mistakenly called Dugas “Patient Zero” and the name stuck. See David M. Auerbach et al, “Cluster of Cases of the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome: Patients Linked by Sexual Contact,” *American Journal of Medicine* 76 (1984): 487-92.

“Patient Zero” in his book, but Shilts indirectly vilified Dugas. His book – and the 1993 HBO movie of the same name, starring Matthew Modine, Richard Masur, and Alan Alda – not only connected AIDS to gay men, it labeled a single promiscuous gay man the “source” of AIDS.

The book infuriated Douglas Crimp (the AIDS activist and MIT art critic mentioned above), among others, and in a series of essays that denounced it – including “How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic” (1987) and “Randy Shilts’s Miserable Failure” (1989) – Crimp assailed Shilts’s portrayal of “Patient Zero.”²¹ Crimp referred to *And the Band Played On* as “homophobic” and “deeply flawed.” Pointing to the immense coverage that “Patient Zero” received in the media after the publication of Shilts’s book, Crimp explained how *And the Band Played On* perpetuated the myth of AIDS as a “gay disease” and that it unfairly gave the media a scapegoat. Offering his perception of the prevailing attitudes about AIDS, Crimp wrote, “The real problem with Patient Zero is that he already existed as a phobic fantasy in the minds of Shilts’s readers before Shilts ever wrote the story.”²²

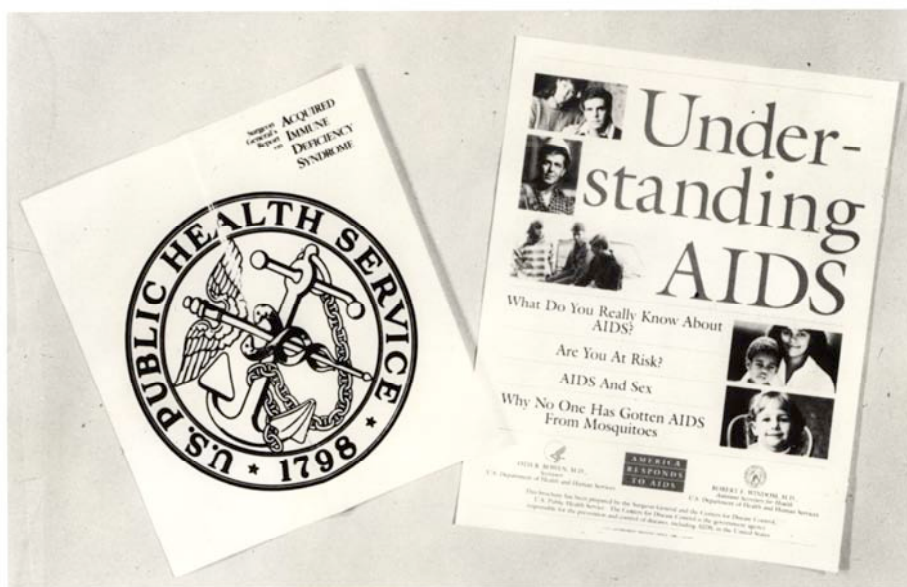
The year after Shilts published his book, Reagan’s Surgeon General, C. Everett Koop, systematically attempted to educate the entire country about AIDS. Koop had been working on a public health brochure titled *Understanding AIDS* since 1986, and in 1988

²¹ Both of these articles are reprinted in Crimp, *Melancholia*.

²² Crimp, *Melancholia*, 124.

he mailed it to all of the 107 million households in the United States, representing the largest public health mailing in history (see figure 1).²³ Koop's title suggested that the public did not "understand" AIDS. In the opening remarks of this eight-page booklet, Koop called AIDS "Public Enemy Number One," adding, "Stopping AIDS is up to you, your family, and loved ones." In the process of describing AIDS, Koop pleaded for action: "Read this brochure and talk about it with those you love. Get involved."²⁴

Figure 1. *Understanding AIDS*. Image courtesy of the U.S. National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, MD.



²³ C. Everett Koop, *Understanding AIDS* (Department of Health & Human Services, 1986).

²⁴ Koop, *Understanding AIDS*, 1.

The same year that the Surgeon General started debunking AIDS myths, however, another health professional continued to promote them. In 1988 psychiatrist Robert E. Gould published an article in *Cosmopolitan* that caused a number of demonstrations and protests.²⁵ Among the misleading claims and factual errors, he suggested “that there is almost no danger of contracting AIDS through *ordinary sexual intercourse*,” and that “the secretions of a healthy vagina are inhospitable to the AIDS virus.”²⁶ Other articles had made false claims about AIDS and women, but this article received much more attention because numerous news organizations discussed it.²⁷ The members of the AIDS activist group ACT UP (discussed below) staged a protest in front of the *Cosmo* office in the Hearst building in New York City, the first protest organized by the women of ACT UP. The women carefully planned the event, filmed every step of their process, and later that year released a short documentary video titled *Doctor, Liars, and Women: AIDS*

²⁵ Robert E. Gould, “Reassuring News About AIDS: A Doctor Tells Why You May Not Be at Risk,” *Cosmopolitan*, January 1988.

²⁶ Gould, “Reassuring News,” 146 (*italics in the original*). Paula Treichler discusses the errors in her “Beyond *Cosmo*: AIDS, Identity, and Inscriptions of Gender,” in *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), 236.

²⁷ Here are just a few of the negative reactions to Gould’s article in the months after *Cosmopolitan* published it: Joan Beck, “Article on AIDS Could Be a Killer,” *Orlando Sentinel*, 3 February 1988; Lewis Cope, “AIDS Experts Battle Confusing Extreme Claims,” *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 17 March 1988; and Chris Norwood, “The AIDS Misinformation Explosion,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 9 May 1988.

Activists Say No To Cosmo.²⁸ According to Paula Treichler, “The Cosmo action marked a significant step forward in understanding the realities of the AIDS epidemic for women and in challenging prevailing representations.”²⁹ AIDS had long been understood not just as gay, but also as male. When the *Cosmo* article appeared in 1988, most cases of AIDS infection were in males. Yet according to the CDC there were at the time 4,349 cases of AIDS in adult women.³⁰ If nothing else, Gould’s article highlighted the problem that women faced seven years into the epidemic: AIDS threatened women, but the media continued to publish conflicting information about AIDS.

Memorializing AIDS

While scholars and the media debated these conflicting descriptions of AIDS, creative people responded to AIDS in their own ways. Richard Goldstein discusses AIDS in film, comedy, television, novels, plays, photography, the visual arts, and other creative media in his essay, “The Implicated and the Immune: Cultural Responses to AIDS,”³¹ but

²⁸ Jean Carlomusto and Maria Maggenti, *Doctor, Liars, and Women: AIDS Activists Say No to Cosmo* (Gay Men’s Health Crisis, 1988).

²⁹ Treichler, “Beyond *Cosmo*,” 237.

³⁰ For more epidemiological and statistical data about the number of AIDS cases in 1988, see Treichler, “Beyond *Cosmo*,” 241-2.

³¹ Richard Goldstein, “The Implicated and the Immune: Cultural Responses to AIDS,” *Milbank Quarterly* 68 (1990): 310. Two significant AIDS plays premiered in 1985: William Hoffman’s *As Is* and Larry Kramer’s *The Normal Heart*. That year also saw the appearance of the first AIDS movies, *An Early Frost* (NBC Productions, 1985),

he calls the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt “the best-known artwork about AIDS.”³² Cleve Jones, a gay activist, made the first quilt panel in 1986 for his friend Marvin Feldman, who had died of AIDS in October 1986. In June 1987, Jones and a few of his friends founded the NAMES Project Foundation in the Castro district of San Francisco (a predominately white, gay neighborhood since the 1960s). The NAMES Project sent out a nationwide call for people to send quilt panels to San Francisco. They wanted to display the quilt at the upcoming March for Lesbian and Gay Rights – and they were successful. On October 11, 1987, they displayed the full AIDS Quilt for the first time on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.³³ On that day it included 1,920 3-by-6-foot panels, and it stretched longer than the distance of a football field. Cleve Jones said:

I truly believed that when we went to Washington in 1987, it would be like Jericho, that what we had built was so beautiful, so exquisite. I thought, they are going to see the evidence of our labor and they will be moved.³⁴

staring Aidan Quinn, and *Parting Glances* (Rondo Productions, 1985). In 1986 Michael Lindsay-Hogg turned Hoffman’s play *As Is* into a movie. For more on these movies, see Frank Pilipp and Charles Shull, “TV Movies of the First Decade of AIDS,” *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 21 (1993): 19-26.

³² Goldstein, “Implicated and the Immune,” 310.

³³ Gregg Stull, “The AIDS Memorial Quilt: Performing Memory, Piecing Action,” *American Art* (2001): 86. Jones reflects back on these events in his “The AIDS Memorial Quilt October 1987: Quilt Creator Cleve Jones Recounts the Inspiration for the Most Eloquent Memorial to Lives Lost to AIDS,” *Advocate*, 12 November 2002.

³⁴ Quoted in Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 186.

Each of the panels of the AIDS Quilt memorialized a single individual. The NAMES Project treated each panel with great care and reverence. People from all walks of life contributed panels consisting of materials such as cloth, leather, photographs, stuffed animals, clothing, wedding rings, credit cards, dolls, flags, champagne glasses, condoms, cowboy boots, feather boas, human hair, old quilts, and cremation ashes.³⁵ Although the quilt makers created panels that featured a wide variety of subject matter, they created panels that together formed an enormous visual reminder of the vast devastation caused by AIDS.³⁶

The AIDS Quilt – the largest memorial to AIDS – brought nationwide attention to the AIDS epidemic. Once again, though, Douglas Crimp offered criticism – or at least ambivalence. In a 1991 essay titled “The Spectacle of Mourning,” he wrote:

I wonder what kind of ordinariness other people see. And that’s one reason for my ambivalence. Does the quilt sanitize or sentimentalize gay life? Does it render

³⁵ Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 183.

³⁶ Cleve Jones, who is no longer with the NAMES Project Foundation, has been in a drawn out legal battle with the NAMES Project Foundation concerning ownership of portions of the AIDS Quilt. See, for example, Matthew S. Bajko, “AIDS Quilt Settlement Talks Collapse,” *Bay Area Reporter*, 1 December 2005; Wyatt Buchanan, “AIDS Quilt’s Permanent Return to City in Doubt: Portion of Project Destined for S.F. Still Entangled in Legal Battle,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 4 January 2007; and Jesse McKinley, “Fight over Quilt Reflects Changing Times in Battle against AIDS,” *New York Times*, 31 January 2007.

For more on the AIDS Quilt, see also Cleve Jones and Jeff Dawson, *Stitching a Revolution: The Making of an Activist* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2001) and Cindy Ruskin, *The Quilt: Stories from the NAMES Project* (New York: Pocket Books, 1988).

invisible what makes people hate us? Does it make their continuing disavowal possible?³⁷

Crimp questions one of the elements that made the AIDS Quilt so powerful and moving: its familiarity as an art form. He felt conflicted about the quilt's sanitation of gay life and he seemed uncomfortable with an artwork that eased the collective pain and guilt caused by AIDS – even if it brought a community together and encouraged discourse about AIDS.

The AIDS Quilt, however, remained a powerful tool that celebrated individuality, but that also helped to erase difference by giving everyone an equal voice – one panel for each individual. More importantly, Cleve Jones, like many of the musicians discussed in the following chapters, patterned his artistic response to AIDS on an art form that audiences could easily recognize and accept. This recognizable form acted as the common conduit to bring people together. As Marita Sturken suggested, the quilt represented “an attempt to incorporate those symbolically cast out of America – homosexuals, drug users, the poor – back into the nation.”³⁸ The quilt did so as a recognizable form of Americana, and it functioned as a memorial, like the Vietnam Memorial (the other major subject of Sturken's book). In the *Journal of Sex Research*, E.

³⁷ The essay is reprinted in Crimp, *Melancholia*, 195-202. The quotation is from p. 200.

³⁸ Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 192.

Michael Gorman observed that gay men “wept over the quilt as if over a battlefield.”³⁹ As a quilt it could function as Americana, but also as “high art,” worthy of a museum.⁴⁰ The purpose of the quilt may have been political, but it also conveyed a sense of nurturing, comfort, and familiarity. Other AIDS art did the opposite.

AIDS Activism

During the mid-1980s a small group of young, gay professionals held meetings in New York. Partially in response to Buckley’s comments in 1986 about tattooing gay men, the group decided in their meetings to appropriate the inverted pink triangle that Nazi’s used in concentration camps to identify gay or bisexual men, and they put it on a poster – except, as figure 2 shows, they “pointed it [the triangle] up to signify hope.”⁴¹ Below the triangle they printed the words “Silence = Death.” These men put the posters

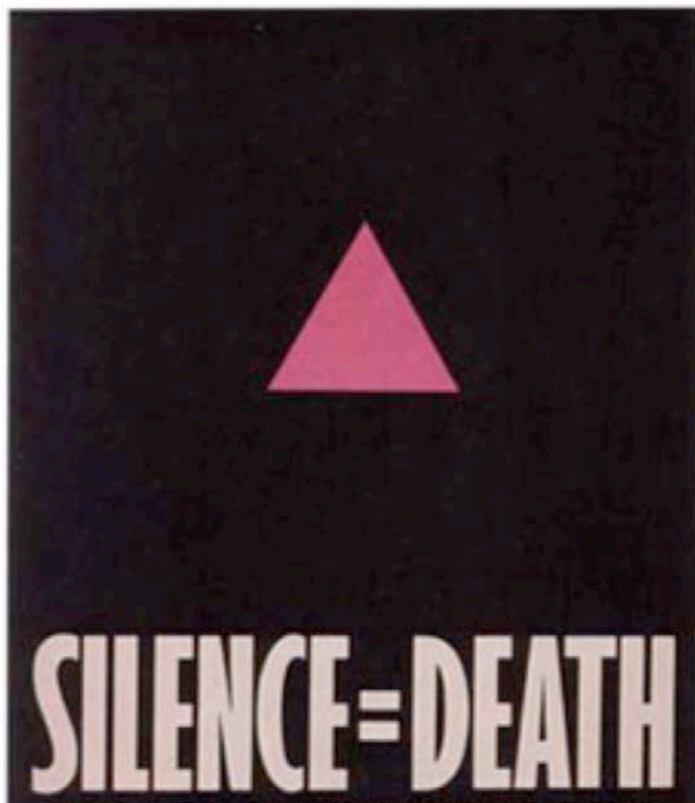
³⁹ E. Michael Gorman, “Anthropological Reflections on the HIV Epidemic among Gay Men,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 28 (1991): 269.

⁴⁰ For more on the construction of quilts as “fine art,” see Karin Elizabeth Peterson, “Discourse and Display: The Modern Eye, Entrepreneurship, and the Cultural Transformation of the Patchwork Quilt,” *Sociological Perspectives* 46 (2003): 461-90.

⁴¹ The quotation, as well as additional information concerning the history of the Silence = Death Project, can be found in Richard Goldstein, “ACT UP: 10 Years and Counting – How AIDS Activists Tapped the Power of Art,” *Village Voice*, 25 March 1997. For more on the history of the pink triangle and its use in the Nazi Holocaust, see Erik N. Jensen, “The Pink Triangle and Political Consciousness: Gays, Lesbians, and the Memory of Nazi Persecution,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11 (2002): 319-49. In 1989 Larry Kramer returned to the Holocaust metaphor for the title of his book, *Reports from the Holocaust: The Making of an AIDS Activist* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989).

up around New York City, and Silence = Death soon became one of the most publicly recognized slogans concerning AIDS. This group began to call themselves the “Silence = Death Project.” By the early 1990s the image of the pink triangle and the caption Silence = Death, according to Douglas Crimp and Adam Rolston, “[signified] AIDS activism to an entire community of people confronting the epidemic.”⁴²

Figure 2. Silence = Death Poster.



⁴² Douglas Crimp and Adam Rolston, *AIDS Demo Graphics* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990), 14.

Lee Edelman, an English professor at Tufts University, deconstructed the phrase “Silence = Death” in a 1989 article for the *South Atlantic Quarterly*:

For what is striking about Silence = Death as the most widely publicized, gay-articulated language of response to the AIDS epidemic is its insistence upon the therapeutic property of discourse without specifying in any way what should or must be said.⁴³

“Silence = Death” became a powerful rallying cry not only because it asked people to speak up about AIDS, but also because it implicated those who did not speak up in murder and death. The slogan required one to figure out the appropriate individual and collective response.

The Silence = Death poster marked just the beginning. On March 10, 1987, at the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center in downtown Manhattan, Larry Kramer, author of the first AIDS play, *The Normal Heart*, delivered an impassioned, confrontational speech:

I sometimes think we have a death wish. I think we must want to die. I have never been able to understand why for six long years we have sat back and let ourselves literally be knocked off man by man – without fighting back. I have heard of denial, but this is more than denial; this is a death wish.⁴⁴

Kramer’s speech called for action. Two days later 300 men met and started a new non-partisan organization devoted to political action. Kramer’s speech marked the start of the

⁴³ Lee Edelman, “The Plague of Discourse: Politics, Literary Theory and AIDS,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 88 (1989): 310.

⁴⁴ Kramer, *Reports from the Holocaust*, 128.

AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), and its membership included the men from the Silence = Death Project.⁴⁵

A few days later came encouraging news. On March 20, 1987, the FDA approved one of the first anti-HIV drugs in the United States, AZT (zidovudine). Originally intended to treat cancer, the drugs were extremely beneficial to AIDS patients because they increased the number T4 cells, which support the immune system. AZT brought hope to people with AIDS and their loved ones, but it also caused a great deal of controversy. Although it saved lives, it had exceptionally toxic side effects and came with a high price tag. When Burroughs-Wellcome (now GlaxoSmithKline) first started selling AZT in 1987, it cost between \$8,000 and \$10,000 per person per year (in comparison, today AIDS drugs are available for as little as \$140 annually).⁴⁶ Just four days after the FDA approved AZT, ACT UP held their first event on March 24 on Wall Street to protest the high cost of the AIDS drug. The next month, on April 15, they knew the media would

⁴⁵ The highly structured ACT UP organization initially consisted of six committees: Actions, Coordinating, Fundraising, Issues, Media, and Outreach. Presently ACT UP has more than seventy chapters in the United States and worldwide.

Twenty years later, on March 13, 2007, Kramer spoke about the history of ACT UP at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center and a video (with a transcription) of his speech is available for viewing at www.gaycenter.org/events/actupVideo.

⁴⁶ These lower costs are due, in part, to the efforts of the Clinton Foundation. See, for example, Patrick Healy and Eric Konisberg, "How to Socialize with an Ex-President? Finance His Good Deeds," *New York Times*, 28 October 2006.

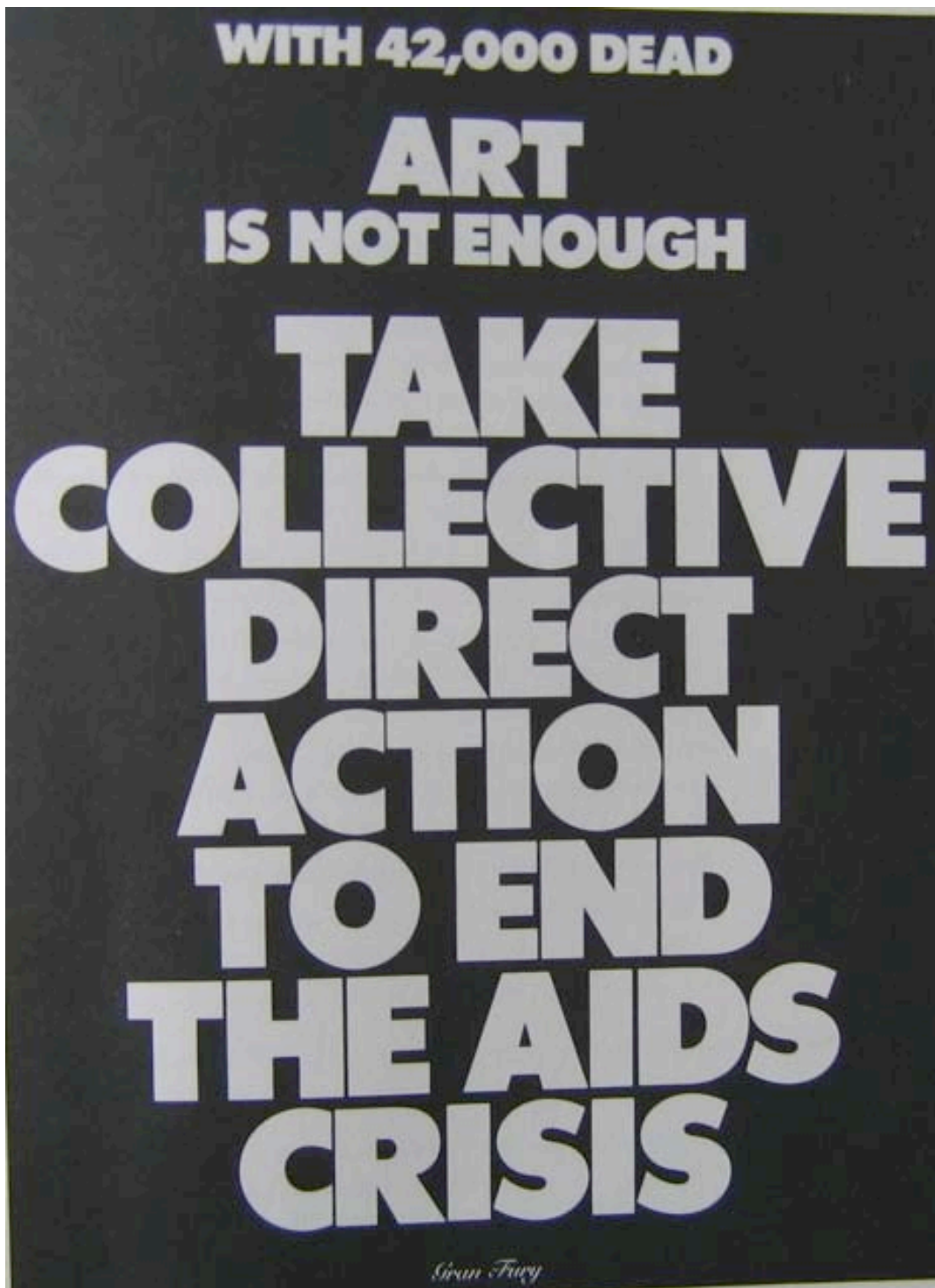
be covering last minute tax returns and shrewdly staged a protest at the New York City General Post Office. ACT UP saw an opportunity and, true to their name, took action.

By 1988 ACT UP increasingly found the media's spotlight. One part of the organization had its own name: Gran Fury, taken from the Plymouth automobile of the same name that law enforcement agencies often used. Gran Fury served as ACT UP's propaganda mechanism and artistic collaborative behind many posters, T-shirts, buttons, banners, billboards, bus signs, and other artwork. Like the activist group Guerrilla Girls, Gran Fury used guerrilla art to raise awareness of important issues.⁴⁷ The members of ACT UP wanted to continue the success of the Silence = Death poster, and in 1988 they created a new poster, reproduced in figure 3, that read: "With 42,000 Dead / Art Is Not Enough / Take Collective Direct Action to End the AIDS Crisis / Gran Fury."⁴⁸ Much like the Silence = Death poster, this poster did not promote specific activism. But unlike the earlier version, it argued that artistic responses are not sufficient and it called for a unified response. Douglas Crimp identified two kinds of AIDS art: one that articulated feelings of loss and another that called for political activism and provided a "critical, theoretical, activist alternative to the personal, elegiac expressions that appeared to

⁴⁷ Established two years before ACT UP in 1985, the Guerrilla Girls focused more on issues of gender and race than AIDS. Unlike the members of ACT UP, the Guerrilla Girls hide their identities, often donning gorilla masks and black leather jackets. For more on the Guerrilla Girls, see, for example, Josephine Withers, "The Guerrilla Girls," *Feminist Studies* 14 (1988): 284-300.

⁴⁸ This poster is reprinted in Crimp and Rolston, *AIDS Demo Graphics*, 21.

Figure 3. Art Is Not Enough (Poster, Gran Fury, 1988).



dominate the art-world response to AIDS.”⁴⁹ Only activist art, in his estimation, could have any significant impact on ending AIDS.

The elegiac art that Crimp did not find useful included Nicholas Nixon’s *Pictures of People* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1988. The exhibition consisted of photographs Nixon took of people with AIDS, many depicting the deteriorating flesh of its subject over time. This exhibit did not show people with AIDS, it showed “AIDS victims” – a crucial distinction to Crimp and other AIDS activists. ACT UP protested at the event because they believed everyone needed to do more than simply eulogize “AIDS victims.” They wanted determined, sometimes militant, engagement with the status quo and they saw their “Art Is Not Enough” poster as one example of the kind of artwork that ACT UP hoped would effect change, such as lowering the cost of AIDS drugs.⁵⁰

Perhaps a more appropriate label for ACT UP’s art is “agitprop,” because what they produce always promulgates a political agenda – the term “agitprop” is a combination of the words “agitation” and “propaganda.”⁵¹ Although the members of

⁴⁹ Crimp, *Melancholia*, 40.

⁵⁰ For more on Gran Fury, see Douglas Crimp, “Gran Fury Talks to Douglas Crimp,” *Artforum* 41, no. 8 (2003): 70-3.

⁵¹ For a discussion of agitprop, see, for example, Richard Bodek, “The Not-So-Golden Twenties: Everyday Life and Communist Agitprop in Weimar-Era Berlin,” *Journal of Social History* 30 (1996): 55-78; and Lynn Mally, “Exporting Soviet Culture: The Case of Agitprop Theater,” *Slavic Review* 62 (2003): 324-42.

ACT UP did not offer prescriptive definitions of activist art, two features of Gran Fury's art merit discussion: the presence of blood and a strong sexual content. Since the beginning of the epidemic, blood remained a source of great anxiety, and in 1983 scientists finally determined how to test blood for the presence of HIV antibodies. Bodily fluids had played a central role in the AIDS epidemic because by the end of the 1980s, scientists had figured out that HIV could only be transmitted via blood, semen, vaginal fluid, or breast milk. Gran Fury focused their efforts on blood and produced another poster in 1988 that read: "The Government Has Blood on Its Hands / One AIDS Death Every Half Hour" (see figure 4).⁵² The original members of ACT UP started the organization, in part, to pressure the FDA to expedite drug trials. The FDA normally spent years testing new drugs, but people with AIDS could not wait years for lengthy drug trials to finish. Thus, ACT UP staged a well-publicized protest at the FDA in Rockville, Md., in October 1988. The protesters wore white lab coats with the words "The FDA has" followed by two bloody handprints (see figure 5).⁵³ Protesters may or may not have used real blood on their lab coats. By incorporating blood in their art and their protests, Gran Fury and ACT UP played off general fears and transferred attention away from the actions of gay men with "tainted" blood to government inaction.

⁵² This poster is reprinted in Crimp and Rolston, *AIDS Demo Graphics*, 80.

⁵³ For more on blood in artistic responses to HIV/AIDS, with special emphasis on dance, see Chapter 1, "Blood and Sweat" in Gere, *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic*.

Gran Fury's agitprop also featured strong sexual content, especially homoerotic subject matter. One poster depicted two male sailors kissing with the caption "Read My Lips." Another series of posters, inspired by a well-known, racially diverse "United Colors of Benetton" advertising campaign, included interracial straight, gay, and lesbian couples kissing below the caption, "Kissing Doesn't Kill. Greed and Indifference Do."⁵⁴ An erect penis dominated another poster and included the following three phrases: "Sexism Rears Its Unprotected Head / MEN: Use Condoms or Beat It / AIDS Kills Women" (see figure 6).⁵⁵ In response to ACT UP members "who felt the graphic glorified phallic power more forcefully than it encouraged safer sex,"⁵⁶ Gran Fury replaced the poster with a sticker that played off "Men at Work" signs, and substituted the words "Men / Use Condoms or Beat It" (see figure 7). ACT UP's techniques effected change. Each poster drew attention to itself. The forceful nature of the messages empowered a generation of gay men who could no longer afford to be seen as sissies. But Gran Fury's work did not only target gay men – another poster from 1988 read "All People with AIDS Are Innocent." Their work effectively drew attention to the AIDS

⁵⁴ Amelia Jones, *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2006), 224. For more on later Benetton ad campaigns, including one that portrayed a person living with AIDS, see Henry A. Giroux, "Consuming Social Change: The 'United Colors of Benetton,'" *Cultural Critique* 26 (1994): 5-32.

⁵⁵ See Crimp and Rolston, *AIDS Demo Graphics*, 56, 63, 4.

⁵⁶ Nancy Stoller, *Lessons from the Damned: Queers, Whores, and Junkies Respond to AIDS* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 128.

Figure 4. The Government Has Blood on Its Hands (Poster, Gran Fury, 1988).



Figure 5. Protest at the Food and Drug Administration Headquarters (Photo, Rick Reinhard, October 1988, cited in Gere, *How to Make Dances*, p. 64).

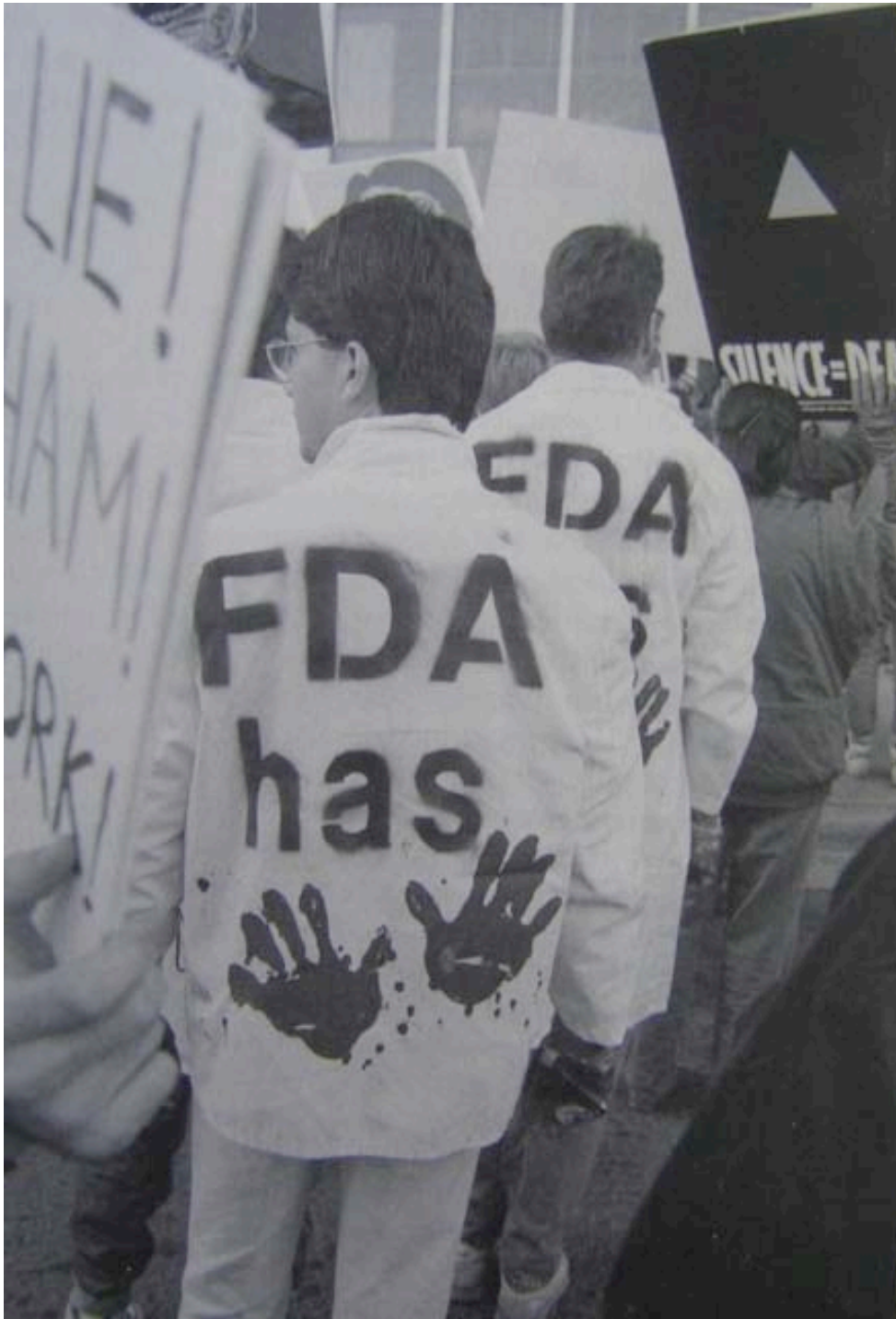


Figure 6. Sexism Rears Its Unprotected Head (Poster, Gran Fury, 1988, cited in Crimp, *AIDS Demographics*, p. 63).



Figure 7. Men Use Condoms or Beat It (Crack-and-Peel Sticker, Gran Fury, 1988, cited in Crimp, *AIDS Demographics*, p. 65).



epidemic, and “by 1992, Gran Fury was the darling of the art world.”⁵⁷ Through carefully planned public actions, gorilla art, and other means, ACT UP would become the most powerful, publicly recognizable AIDS activist organization.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Goldstein, “ACT UP,” 45.

⁵⁸ ACT UP continues to put itself in the public eye. For example, the November 1, 2004 edition of *New Yorker* published a series of portraits by Richard Avedon titled “Democracy 2004” that included a photograph of nine members from ACT UP (Minou Arjomand, Paul Davis, Sharon Ann Lynch, Eric Sawyer, Toby Anekwe, Cindra Feuer, Amanda Lugg, Bree Akesson, and Perry Souchuk), and each person appeared fully naked, clothes around the ankles, with the words “STOP AIDS” stamped on his or her body.

ACT UP had a counterpart in music. There are a number of similarities between Diamanda Galás's (b. 1955) AIDS-inspired music and ACT UP's militant AIDS art. Galás is a singer, composer, and AIDS activist who participated in ACT UP demonstrations.⁵⁹ As Gran Fury did with their visual and performative art, Galás made her *Masque of the Red Death* (1989) bloody, sexual, and militant. When Galás performed her *Plague Mass*, an adaptation of *Masque of the Red Death*, she performed mostly naked and dripping in stage blood. The sounds she produced tested the boundaries between singing and screaming. Feminist musicologist Susan McClary described *Masque of the Red Death* in this way: "ear-splitting volume, a broad spectrum of bizarre timbres, the semiotics of extreme anguish, and a structure that builds intensity through sheer repetition."⁶⁰ Likewise, Michael Flanagan, who co-authored the program notes for the *Plague Mass* album (Mute, 1991), later wrote: "This is not the nice music of a person

2007 marked the 20th anniversary of ACT UP and Los Angeles's Drkrn Gallery celebrated the anniversary with a show titled "Silence = Death: Los Angeles AIDS Activism 1987-2007" featuring photos by Chuck Stallard (Stacie Stukin, "Emotional Record of Voices Raised in Unison: Exhibition's Focus is a Group That Protested the AIDS Crisis," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 June 2007). The member of the New York chapter celebrated by blocking traffic in Manhattan, among other events ("AIDS Group Marks a Milestone," *Newsday* [New York], 30 March 2007).

⁵⁹ Rebecca A. Pope and Susan J. Leonardi, "Divas and Disease, Mourning and Militancy: Diamanda Galás's Operatic Plague Mass," in *The Work of Opera: Genre, Nationhood and Sexual Difference*, ed. Richard Dellamora and Daniel Fischlin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 324.

⁶⁰ Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 110-1.

who wants to play fairly with the forces against which she aims her sonic assault. This is terrorism, pure and simple.”⁶¹ While McClary and Flanagan focused on the shock value of Galás’s work, of more importance is how Galás sonically and performatively recreated the affect of ACT UP’s agitprop. Like Gran Fury, Galás believed that her art needed to be forceful. “The delivery of any material on AIDS,” according to Galás, “has to be as powerful as the material itself.”⁶²

1989-1990 As Years of Change

During the late-1980s AIDS awareness grew in all levels of society, and various forces changed the cultural perception of AIDS. Randy Shilts again provoked widespread controversy in 1989 when he published an article in *Esquire* entitled “Talking AIDS to Death.”⁶³ Lou Reed released his touching “Halloween Parade” in 1989.⁶⁴ Most importantly, though, 1990 saw the passage of the Ryan White CARE (Comprehensive

⁶¹ Michael Flanagan, “Invoking Diamanda,” in *Life Sentences: Writers, Artists, and AIDS*, ed. Thomas Avena (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1994), 161.

⁶² Quoted in Thomas Avena, “Interview: Diamanda Galás,” in *Life Sentences: Writers, Artists, and AIDS* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1994), 185.

For more on Galás, see also David Schwarz, “Lamentation, Abjection, and the Music of Diamanda Galás,” in *Listening Subjects: Music, Psychoanalysis, Culture* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 133-63.

⁶³ Among other places, this essay was reproduced in Houghton Mifflin’s *The Best American Essays*, ed. Robert Atwan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995).

⁶⁴ Lou Reed, “Halloween Parade,” *New York* (Sire, 1989).

AIDS Resource Emergency) Act – other than Medicaid, it remains the largest single source of public funds for treating people with HIV/AIDS in the United States.

Daniel Fox, Professor of Social Sciences in Medicine at the State University of New York-Stonybrook, wrote about this period in his essay, “The Politics of HIV Infection: 1989-1990 as Years of Change.” Fox discussed the growing conception of AIDS as something that could be treated, and the resulting changes in public health policy, during this time. He wrote, “Plagues are fought; chronic diseases are managed.”⁶⁵ He felt that the politics of HIV infection changed in 1989 based on two key factors: (1) disadvantaged minorities were contracting HIV infection at a higher rate than the rest of society and (2) health officials began to accept that HIV should be understood as a chronic disease rather than a plague.⁶⁶ As a result of the first change, blacks and Hispanic minority leaders, such as Yale Law Professor Harlan Dalton, became more involved in the HIV lobby and helped force HIV prevention programs to change so as to incorporate disadvantaged minorities.⁶⁷

Susan Sontag’s 1989 book about the actual language of the AIDS epidemic, *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, caught the attention of scholars and the general public and functioned

⁶⁵ Fox, “Politics of HIV Infection,” 134.

⁶⁶ Fox, “Politics of HIV Infection,” 126-7.

⁶⁷ For example, Dalton discusses the black community’s initial reaction to AIDS in Harlon L. Dalton, “AIDS in Blackface,” *Daedalus* 118 (1989): 205-27.

as another agent of change during the end of the decade.⁶⁸ Following her earlier influential book *Illness As a Metaphor* (1978), Sontag's *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (1989) critiqued the words that, in her view, failed to describe the reality of the AIDS epidemic, including "fight," "battle," and other military metaphors. *AIDS and Its Metaphors* concluded:

We are not being invaded. The body is not a battlefield. The ill are neither unavoidable casualties nor the enemy. We – medicine, society – are not authorized to fight back by any means whatever. . . . About that metaphor, the military one, I would say, if I may paraphrase Lucretius: Give it back to the war-makers.⁶⁹

Sontag contended that such military metaphors were of no value or, worse, that they caused people to feel guilt or shame about "losing" their battle. Much like ACT UP, Sontag challenged the "blame the victim" paradigm that stigmatized people with AIDS.

In her book, Sontag focused on the language of AIDS as well as a variety of cultural issues related to AIDS. In one often-cited sentence – a sentence one reviewer

⁶⁸ See, for example, Ken Adachi, "A New Class of Pariahs," *Toronto Star*, 11 February 1989; Ellen Sue Bryan, "The Struggle against AIDS: Susan Sontag Tells Us That to Succeed We Must Combat Not Only the Disease, but Also Its Metaphors," *St. Petersburg Times* (Florida), 23 April 1989; Gregory Kolovakos, "AIDS Words," *The Nation*, 1 May 1989; Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, "Books of the Times: Shaping the Reality of AIDS through Language," *New York Times*, 16 January 1989; Paul Robinson, "Against Fatalism," *New York Times*, 22 January 1989; and Michael Specter, "The Sontag Metaphor: From the Author, an Elliptical View of AIDS and Its Implications," *Washington Post*, 25 March 1989.

⁶⁹ This quotation is taken from the 1990 edition that combined both books: Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Picador, 1990), 183.

called “the most troubling in her essay”⁷⁰ – she mentioned the rise in conservative behavior that paralleled the rise in the number of AIDS cases:

The behavior AIDS is stimulating is part of a larger grateful return to what is perceived as “conventions,” like the return to figure and landscape, tonality and melody, plot and character, and other much vaunted repudiations of difficult modernism in the arts.⁷¹

Sontag suggests that AIDS provided a reason to go back, which is what political and social conservatives wanted. In writing about the kinds of artistic responses to AIDS that used conventional forms, she sounded remarkably similar to Crimp and his condemnation of “elegiac expressions that appeared to dominate the art-world response to AIDS” from the previous year.⁷²

Throughout the 1980s and the 1990s, artists and musicians created two seemingly different categories of AIDS art: the elegiac/mournful/symbolic art, represented by the AIDS Quilt, and the activist/militant/subversive art, represented by ACT UP. Although the differences between the two artistic responses were real, the notion that one kind of art affected change more or less than another is questionable. None of the three case studies examined in this project – Corigliano’s symphony, TLC’s “Waterfalls,” and Red Hot’s *America Is Dying Slowly* – can straightforwardly be labeled either elegiac or

⁷⁰ Kolovakos, “AIDS Words,” 599.

⁷¹ Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*, 166.

⁷² Crimp, *Melancholia*, 40.

activist, although, among the three, Symphony no. 1 is the most elegiac and *America Is Dying Slowly* is the most activist.

Each of these musical works featured in this project appeared at separate, but crucial, points in the history of AIDS. Independent of one another, these musicians created meaningful musical spaces that promoted conversations about AIDS. As the next chapter will show, Corigliano, like these other musicians, conveyed ideas and information about AIDS using familiar musical gestures to help remind classical music audiences that AIDS affects everyone. Whereas TLC communicated by way of hip-hop and the musicians featured on *America Is Dying Slowly* conveyed ideas using the sounds and the musical language of rap, Corigliano used the well-known genre of the symphony.

Chapter 2
“Those Friends that I Have Lost”: John Corigliano’s Symphony no. 1 and the Instrumental Construction of AIDS

In 1991 John Corigliano (b. 1938) and William Hoffman (b. 1925) appeared on the cover of *Advocate: The National Gay and Lesbian Newsmagazine* for a story concerning their opera, *The Ghosts of Versailles* – the Metropolitan Opera’s first commission since 1967.¹ The article, by K. Robert Schwarz (1956-1999), a prominent New York music critic and frequent contributor to the *New York Times* and *Musical America*, discussed a variety of subjects including “gay sensibility” in music, AIDS activism, and homophobia. Partly because Schwarz published the article in the *Advocate*, he could delve into subjects that were beyond the traditional scope of music criticism found in other more general-audience newspapers and magazines. In the article Corigliano and Hoffman, two openly gay men, discussed their belief in the redemptive power of art. Both men had produced AIDS-inspired art: in 1985 Hoffman published one of the first AIDS plays, *As Is*, a story of a gay man in New York who finds out he has AIDS, and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra premiered Corigliano’s Symphony no. 1 in 1990. In the *Advocate* article, Corigliano asserted,

My Symphony no. 1 can go into a concert hall and take people who are totally indifferent to the human suffering of AIDS and help them to approach AIDS in a

¹ K. Robert Schwarz, “The Ghost of Versailles: Composer John Corigliano and Librettist William M. Hoffman Rethink a Revolution in a New Opera,” *Advocate*, 3 December 1991.

different way. When they hear the symphony and read about its subject, that changes them. So art *has* changed reality.²

This chapter addresses the substance of Corigliano's claim that Symphony no. 1 changed reality – the construction of AIDS – by demonstrating how the work introduced a particular kind of audience to AIDS within the constraints of established musical conventions.

A closer examination of Corigliano's Symphony no. 1 is long overdue given its stature as the one musical response to HIV/AIDS that classical musicians and music scholars may know. The Chicago Symphony, led by Daniel Barenboim, premiered this work on March 15, 1990, and it has since received numerous awards. In 1991 it won the prestigious University of Louisville Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition; the recording of a 1991 performance of Symphony no. 1 by the Chicago Symphony, conducted by Daniel Barenboim, appeared on the *Billboard* classical charts for 69 weeks and won two Grammy Awards – one for Best Orchestral Performance and the other for Best Contemporary Composition; and a 1997 recording by the National Symphony, conducted by Leonard Slatkin, received the Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Classical Composition.³ Some reviewers described Symphony no. 1 with hyper-

² Schwarz, "Ghost of Versailles," 35 (*italics in the original*).

³ In 1991 the Grawemeyer Award totaled \$150,000. Currently, the award is \$200,000. See www.grawemeyer.org for more information. The information about Symphony no. 1's position on the *Billboard* charts comes from David Patrick Stearns, "Slatkin, National Symphony Off to a Bold Recording Start," *USA Today*, 9 November 1995.

emotional terminology when it premiered in Chicago. For example, John Rockwell of the *New York Times* called it “anguished, hysterical and deeply moving” and John von Rhein of the *Chicago Tribune* deemed it “big, powerful, sometimes unsettling, ultimately affecting.”⁴

Since its premiere, audiences have had numerous opportunities to hear live performances of Symphony no. 1. Just one year after the premiere, Richard Dyer of the *Boston Globe* proclaimed it “the most frequently played American symphony written in the second half of the 20th century.”⁵ Two years later John Canarina wrote, “No American symphony of recent years has received as much attention and general acclaim as the First of John Corigliano.”⁶ To date more than 115 orchestras worldwide have performed Corigliano’s first symphony, according to the American Symphony Orchestra League.⁷ Nowadays orchestras do not perform Symphony no. 1 as frequently as they did

⁴ John Rockwell, “Contemporary Anguish in Corigliano Symphony,” *New York Times*, 18 March 1990; and John von Rhein, “Corigliano Score Makes Eloquent World Premiere,” *Chicago Tribune*, 16 March 1990.

⁵ Richard Dyer, “A Poignant Response to AIDS,” *Boston Globe*, 12 July 1991. Dyer received his information from Corigliano’s publisher, Shirmer (personal communication, 20 December 2005) and his carefully worded statement appears to have been accurate.

⁶ John Canarina, “The American Symphony,” in *A Companion to the Symphony*, ed. Robert Layton (London: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 424.

⁷ The American Symphony Orchestra League (ASOL) is one of the best sources for information about performances of works by American composers because it currently tracks performances of more than 320 orchestras in the United States. Although orchestras perform Corigliano’s symphony frequently, there are numerous works by

in 1996, but Symphony no. 1 is undoubtedly successful. The symphony realized the challenge of representing AIDS musically, and it contributed to important discussions about AIDS during the late 1980s. Corigliano did not just compose an “AIDS memorial,” he participated in AIDS activism.

The AIDS Quilt Connection

In his program note for Symphony no. 1, Corigliano wrote that he had lost many friends to AIDS and that the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt deeply affected him when he saw it on the Washington Mall in Washington, D.C. in early 1988 (see figure 8).⁸ The NAMES Project produced the largest physical monument to AIDS; and Corigliano would later produce the largest musical monument to AIDS with Symphony no. 1. Long before Corigliano joined the Chicago Symphony Orchestra as Composer in Residence, he decided that he probably would not compose any symphonies. In an interview with the *Chicago Tribune* in 1990 he said:

American composers that orchestras perform more often than Symphony no. 1. See Appendix A for a list of the most often performed works by American composers since 1988 and Appendix B for a detailed (but not complete) list of performances of Symphony no. 1. For additional information, visit the “Research & Statistics” portion of the American Symphony Orchestra League’s Web site at www.symphony.org/research. I would like to thank Devin Burnworth and Jan Wilson from the ASOL for their assistance and for providing me with this information.

⁸ John Corigliano, “Program Note,” *Symphony no. 1* (G. Schirmer, 1990). His program note occupied just one page in the printed score.

I never thought I would write a symphony. . . . I was always bothered by the “greatness” implied by the title symphony. From Beethoven to Mahler, the symphony was supposed to be an entire world, one’s statement on life. I didn’t feel I had something I wanted to say in that form – until AIDS.⁹

Corigliano reacted to the AIDS Quilt in fairly typical fashion – according to a NAMES Project survey, 71% of the people who viewed the AIDS Quilt said the experience “inspired them to take positive action in their lives in response to AIDS.”¹⁰

Figure 8. The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt (Photo, National Institutes of Health).



⁹ John von Rhein, “Absent Friends: Corigliano Debut Is First Symphony About AIDS,” *Chicago Tribune*, 11 March 1990.

¹⁰ As quoted in Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 213.

Corigliano emphasized the connection between Symphony no. 1 and the AIDS Quilt from the beginning, often describing the symphony as essentially another quilt panel. For example, a few days before the premiere of Symphony no. 1, the *Chicago Tribune* printed Corigliano's description of his experience seeing the AIDS Quilt and hearing speakers take turns reading the names of the people to which the panels were dedicated:

The enormity of the project was staggering; it went on and on, as far as the eye could see. When I walked around the names of some of the people memorialized in the quilt, and I heard their names being read, I can't tell you how it affected me. It was one of the most powerful and moving human statements I have ever seen. It made me want to memorialize in music those friends that I have lost – to touch concertgoers the same way that I was touched.¹¹

He provided a similar account in the symphony's official program note – a note that he included in the album jackets for both recordings of the work and the preface to the published score:

A few years ago I was extremely moved when I first saw "The Quilt," an ambitious interweaving of several thousand fabric panels, each memorializing a person who had died of AIDS, and, most importantly, each designed and constructed by his or her loved ones. This made me want to memorialize in music those I have lost, and reflect on those I am losing. I decided to relate the first three movements of the Symphony to three lifelong musician-friends. In the third movement, still other friends are recalled in a quilt-like interweaving of motivic melodies.¹²

¹¹ von Rhein, "Absent Friends."

¹² Corigliano, "Program Note."

After he finished Symphony no. 1 Corigliano told the *New York Times* in 1992, “This piece is my version of the AIDS Quilt.”¹³ Taken together, these comments indicate the importance of the Quilt to his symphony as well as the kind of cultural work that Corigliano hoped his symphony would accomplish.

Many journalists subsequently highlighted the connection between Symphony no. 1 and the AIDS Quilt, and with the obvious exception of the *The AIDS Quilt Songbook*, few musical works have been as intimately connected to the AIDS Quilt as this symphony.¹⁴ For instance, the *Houston Chronicle* noted, “the seed of the work was planted during visits to the so-called AIDS Quilt.”¹⁵ *USA Today* called Symphony no. 1 “a musical counterpart to the AIDS quilt.”¹⁶ In *Musical America*, K. Robert Schwarz stated, “Inspired by the AIDS quilt and its stitching together of personal memories into a larger canvas, Corigliano sought in his symphony to interweave reminiscences of his own

¹³ Nadine Brozan, “Chronicle,” *New York Times*, 3 January 1992.

¹⁴ One might also include in this group Ronald Caltabiano’s far lesser known *Quilt Panels* (Merion Music, 1990), for violin, viola, violoncello, clarinet, horn, and piano. For more on the *AIDS Quilt Songbook*, see Keith C. Ward, “Musical Responses to HIV and AIDS,” in *Perspectives on American Music since 1950*, ed. James R. Heintze (New York: Garland, 1999).

¹⁵ Charles Ward, “Of Rage and Remembrance: Corigliano’s Symphony No. 1 Honors Friends Lost to AIDS,” *Houston Chronicle*, 1 January 1995.

¹⁶ David Patrick Stearns, “A Musical Portrait of AIDS,” *USA Today*, 30 March 1990.

lost friends.”¹⁷ In *The Art of AIDS*, Rob Baker wrote, “Corigliano clearly intended the musical tapestry to reflect . . . the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt.”¹⁸

Furthermore, some performance venues displayed sections of the Quilt at performances of Symphony no. 1.¹⁹

Like the people who contributed quilt panels to the AIDS Quilt in honor of their loved ones, Corigliano dedicated each of the first three movements of Symphony no. 1 to friends with AIDS. In the published score he indicates that he wrote the first movement “in memory of Sheldon Shkolnik.”²⁰ The second movement, according to the program note, “was written in memory of a friend who was an executive in the music industry.” He dedicated the third movement, “Giulio’s Song,” to the cellist Giulio Sorrentino. Corigliano does not provide the full names of any of his dedicatees in his program notes,

¹⁷ K. Robert Schwarz, “A Symphony for the Age of AIDS: Corigliano, Symphony no. 1,” *Musical America* 111, no. 5 (1991): 43.

¹⁸ Baker, *The Art of AIDS*, 116.

¹⁹ For more on performances of Symphony no. 1 that displayed sections of the AIDS Quilt, see Richard Dyer, “A Stunning Symphony of Grief and Anger,” *Boston Globe*, 26 March 1993; Edward Rothstein, “Themes of AIDS and Remembrance in Corigliano’s Symphony,” *New York Times*, 11 January 1992; and Charles Ward, “Inspired to Remember: Corigliano Symphony Given Intense Premiere,” *Houston Chronicle*, 9 January 1995.

²⁰ Corigliano had dedicated other works to Shkolnik, but Shkolnik felt so touched by the gesture that Shkolnik attended at all three of the Chicago performances in March 1990. About a week later, Sheldon Shkolnik died.

probably to respect the privacy of his friends. However, this vague language also suggests the all-too-common stigma associated with AIDS.

The AIDS Quilt represented warmth and comfort. Despite its massive size, it projected a bright, caring quality for the people who saw it in photographs, on television, and in person. Cleve Jones, the longtime San Francisco gay rights activist who helped found the AIDS Quilt in 1987, once remarked:

I said to myself we need a memorial. Then when the word *quilt* went into my brain, what I remembered was my grandmother tucking me in with this quilt that was made by my great-great-grandmother and has been repaired by various grandmothers and great-aunts over the years. I immediately had a very comforting, warm memory and that was key.²¹

It did what a quilt does best: comfort. The Quilt did not necessarily challenge its audiences like highly sexual, bloody, or confrontational AIDS activist art.²² In fact, Cleve Jones downplayed the role of anger in the quilt:

The quilt has been used to try and appeal to a higher authority. We don't use anger. Anger is released at the quilt, it is expressed in the quilt, but we don't cut people off. And this has been the greatest source of conflict between me and my colleagues in the movement is that they want the quilt to be angrier – let's take it up and use it to surround Bush's summer house . . . But I think in some quarters anger and the expression thereof are highly overrated.²³

²¹ Quoted in Gary Abrams, "AIDS Quilt Comforting U.S. Grief," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 March 1988 (italics in the original).

²² For more on activist AIDS art, see Chapter 1.

²³ Quoted in Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 201.

This is an area where Symphony no. 1 and the AIDS Quilt are not alike, as some sections of Symphony no. 1 scream in anger – or “rage,” to use Corigliano’s word. But unlike much activist AIDS art, Corigliano could temper the anger in his symphony with nostalgia. While one must acknowledge the numerous similarities between the AIDS Quilt and Symphony no. 1, a close examination of the elements of musical style and Corigliano’s program note will show that the comparison to the AIDS Quilt diminishes the potential power of the work. Symphony no. 1 acts as an activist work in the guise of well-known musical conventions, particular to program music and other nineteenth-century constructs and within the broader space of the so-called “new romanticism” of the 1980s and 1990s.

New Romanticism

At the time of the premiere of Symphony no. 1, Corigliano had already experimented with a variety of musical styles. He made a name for himself in the classical music world with works such as his concertos for violin (1963), oboe (1975), clarinet (1977), and flute (1981), his choral symphony *A Dylan Thomas Trilogy* (1976), and his Academy Award-nominated film score *Altered States* (1981). In his compositions up to and including *A Dylan Thomas Trilogy*, Corigliano used conventional notation. He later adopted an “architectural” technique; he sketched out his music in words or pictures and employed a musical style that made use of a much wider variety of compositional

elements, including tonal, microtonal, timbral, minimalist, serial, and aleatory passages.²⁴ Because of the wide variety of musical styles – sometimes within a single musical work – some critics found it especially difficult to label Corigliano’s musical style. Consider, for example, these two *New York Times* critics. Of Corigliano’s Clarinet Concerto, Peter Davis wrote in 1981, “Nearly every 20th-century compositional technique one would care to name is crammed into this half-hour concerto.”²⁵ Bernard Holland, in 1982, suggested that Corigliano’s “music has no style in the usual sense.”²⁶

Although Corigliano’s music resists classification, much of it – particularly Symphony no. 1 – most closely aligns with the characteristics of what came to be called “the new romanticism.” Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Jacob Druckman helped popularize this designation when he organized festivals for the New York Philharmonic in 1983 and 1984 that explored this idea of music.²⁷ The concerts featured music in a variety of styles and included works by Peter Maxwell Davies (b. 1934), Luciano Berio

²⁴ Mark Adamo, “Corigliano, John (Paul),” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. S. Sadie and J. Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001).

²⁵ Peter G. Davis, “Disks Devoted to American Music,” *New York Times*, 12 April 1981.

²⁶ Bernard Holland, “Highbrow Music to Hum,” *New York Times*, 31 January 1982.

²⁷ Anthony Tommasini, “Jacob Druckman, 67, Dies: A Composer and Teacher,” *New York Times*, 27 May 1996.

(1925-2003), David Del Tredici (b. 1937), John Adams (b. 1947), and others.²⁸ In the last decades of the twentieth century, “new romanticism” denoted a kind of music that openly appealed to emotions. Before the New York Philharmonic concerts in 1983 and 1984, Jacob Druckman wrote,

No matter how varied these musics are on the surface, one can discern a steady reemergence of those Dionysian qualities: sensuality, mystery, nostalgia, ecstasy, transcendancy. Whether this new music will be called “Neo-romanticism” or some other term is yet to be seen.²⁹

So-called new romantic composers produced genuinely personal, post-modern music. While some critics have attached words such as “pastiche” or “cliché” to describe certain instances of this music, it would be more accurate to describe “new romanticism” broadly as a kind of music that embraced, rather than rejected, history.³⁰ Some composers of this music utilized tonality not just to reflect the influence of history, but also as an expressive and structural element. Others borrowed actual melodies and themes from past

²⁸ Laura Kuhn, “‘-Isms’: New York: ‘Horizons ‘83,’” *Perspectives of New Music* 21, no. 1/2 (1983): 402-6.

²⁹ Jacob Druckman, “Horizons ‘83: A New Romanticism?” *Symphony Magazine* 34, no. 3 (1983): 16.

³⁰ For the use of terms like “pastiche” or “cliché,” see Donal Henahan, “Concert: Philharmonic Plays Corigliano Work,” *New York Times*, 19 September 1986; and Anne LeBaron and Denys Bouliane, “Darmstadt 1980,” *Perspectives of New Music* 19 (1981): 422.

composers, producing an accessible kind of music. As a result, audiences frequently expressed their enthusiasm for new romanticism.³¹

Ellen Taaffe Zwilich (b. 1939) and George Rochberg (1918-2005) both composed “new romantic music,” and both of them, like Corigliano, reflected their personal experiences with death in their music. Rochberg used the term “new romanticism” as early as the 1960s to describe his own music. In July 1963 he wrote,

It has taken me all these years to recognize and embrace the fact that at root I am a complete romantic and especially now that the question arises on all sides: after abstractionism, what next? The answer rings out clearly: the “new romanticism.”³²

Keenly aware of tradition and history, Rochberg chose titles for his works with historical significance, such as *Capriccio* for two pianos (1949) and *Twelve Bagatelles* (1952), as well as titles that referred to past composers, like *Bartókiana* (1959) and *Nach Bach* (1966). Although a number of composers of Rochberg’s generation, particularly Pierre Boulez (b. 1925) and Milton Babbitt (b. 1916), avoided references to past music, Rochberg freely borrowed from past composers, sometimes note for note, and recomposed existing melodies. In 1982 he said, “I think borrowing is one of the essential traditions of music, an ancient one. And if you are a borrower, as I am, then I see nothing

³¹ For more on the popularity of new romanticism, see, for example, Bob Halliday, “Isn’t It Romantic?” *Washington Post*, 19 February 1985; and Bernard Holland, “Davies Lead American Composers Group,” *New York Times*, 12 January 1987.

³² Quoted in Alexander L. Ringer, “The Music of George Rochberg,” *Musical Quarterly* 52 (1966): 414.

to prevent borrowing from oneself.”³³ In his String Quartet no. 3 (1972, winner of the Naumburg Chamber Composition Award), for example, he placed sections of atonal music side by side with others in the style of Beethoven.³⁴ In his *Music for the Magic Theater* (1965), Rochberg quoted Mahler’s (1860-1911) Symphony no. 9, Mozart’s (1756-1791) Divertimento K. 287, and a Miles Davis (1926-1991) trumpet solo, among other works.³⁵ In *Nach Bach* (1966), a fantasy for harpsichord or piano, Rochberg borrowed material from J. S. Bach’s (1685-1750) Partita in E minor, no. 6 for keyboard (BWV 830). While *Nach Bach* includes a handful of direct quotations from Bach’s Partita, Rochberg’s piece is decidedly contemporary, with no measure lines and numerous tritones as well as other dissonances.

Rochberg embraced what he called a “spatial,” rather than a “temporal,” image of music. He believed that his compositions should express deeply personal sentiments. In 1963 he wrote, “it is in the condition of man [*sic*] that we discover the tendencies of his art; and as man’s view of his present reality alters, so, too, does his view of art and its

³³ Cole Gagne and Tracy Caras, *Soundpieces: Interviews with American Composers* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1982).

³⁴ For more on this string quartet, see Jay Reise, “Rochberg the Progressive,” *Perspectives of New Music* 19 (1980-1981): 395-407. Steven D. Block responded to Reise’s article in Block, “George Rochberg: Progressive or Master Forger?” *Perspectives of New Music* 21 (1982-1983): 407-9.

³⁵ Ringer, “The Music of George Rochberg,” 426.

expressive structure.”³⁶ Consequently, the death of Rochberg’s twenty-year-old son, Paul, in 1964 had a dramatic influence not just on Rochberg’s personal life altogether, but also on his musical style and the choices he made. Shortly thereafter Rochberg denounced serialism and began to compose music using any past musical language that he felt appropriate.

Ellen Taaffe Zwilich (b. 1939) is another one of the most prominent representatives of “new romanticism.” In 1975 Zwilich became the first woman to receive a doctorate in composition from Julliard, and in 1983 she became the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize in Music.³⁷ She evoked past musical genres when she used titles such as *Divertimento* (1983) and *Concerto Grosso* (1985). When her husband, Joseph Zwilich, died in 1979, she became much more interested in representing her personal feelings in her musical compositions. Six years later Zwilich described how her husband’s death changed her perspective of the world:

I loved Joe very dearly, and miss him to this day, yet his death taught me nothing so much as the joy of being alive – the joy of breathing, walking, feeling well, swimming, the joy of being human. Suddenly all talk of method and style seemed trivial; I became interested in meaning. I wanted to say something, musically, about life and living.³⁸

³⁶ George Rochberg, “The New Image of Music,” *Perspectives of New Music* 2 (1963): 9.

³⁷ Ken Terry, “Ellen Taaffe Zwilich,” *BMI: The Many Worlds of Music*, no. 2 (1983): 46-7.

³⁸ Quoted in Tim Page, “The Music of Ellen Zwilich,” *New York Times*, 14 July 1985.

Zwilich and Rochberg are just two representatives of “new romanticism” and their musical works do not sound anything alike, but they share a common approach. They did not compose music using the same “method and style,” they instead produced music born of similar sentiments, such as happiness, loss, anger, or frustration. American new romantics, who also included David Del Tredici (b. 1937), Christopher Rouse (b. 1945), and a dozen others, did not compose music that sounded similar – like Mozart and Haydn or Bach and Telemann – they composed music that grew out of comparable emotional spaces.

Corigliano, like Rochberg and Zwilich, composed music that reflected his emotions. All three composers at times treated their musical compositions like memorials, and each of them were ever mindful of the past. In his interview for the *Advocate* article, Corigliano asked, “Can you reconcile the beauties of the past with the revolutionary spirit of the new? [I] neither wish to destroy the past nor deny the future.”³⁹ Corigliano freely used direct quotations. For example, he based his *Fantasia on an Ostinato* (1985) – a work he called his “first experiment in so-called minimalist techniques”⁴⁰ – on a well-known passage from the second movement of Beethoven’s Symphony no. 7, and in his *Ghosts of Versailles* (commissioned in 1984) he included

³⁹ Schwarz, “Ghost of Versailles,” 35.

⁴⁰ Quoted in David Burge, “Review of *Fantasia on an Ostinato* for Solo Piano (1985) and *Fantasia on an Ostinato* for Orchestra (1986),” *Notes* 46 (1990): 1075.

quotations from Mozart and Rossini.⁴¹ Finally, whereas Zwilich and Rochberg wrote music in response to the death of their family members, Corigliano obviously drew his inspiration from the sickness and death of his friends due to AIDS. The concert compositions of each of these composers functioned as memorials.

Audiences and critics adored and respected Corigliano's music well before he started composing Symphony no. 1. Aaron Copland had called Corigliano "the real thing – one of the most talented composers on the scene today."⁴² In 1982 *Fanfare* magazine called Corigliano "a major musical voice in this decade."⁴³ The *U.S. News & World Report* described Corigliano as a composer with a "reputation as a creator of crowd-pleasing works."⁴⁴ In 1982 Bernard Holland of the *New York Times* felt astonished when he saw how Corigliano's Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra (1977) had a "visceral effect on New York Philharmonic subscription audiences."⁴⁵ By 1990 David Burge, writing in *Notes*, declared, "One must take him seriously."⁴⁶ These accounts suggest that

⁴¹ One reviewer went so far as to label *Ghosts of Versailles* "a 'sequel' to *Figaro*." "The Review Section: Live Performance," *Musical Times*, February 1992, 87.

⁴² As quoted in Holland, "Highbrow Music."

⁴³ David P. James, "Between the Frames: John Corigliano and *Altered States*," *Fanfare*, March/April 1982, 65.

⁴⁴ "World of Opera Booming to Yankee Beat," *U.S. News & World Report*, 5 April 1982.

⁴⁵ Holland, "Highbrow Music."

⁴⁶ Burge, "Review," 1075.

audiences embraced Corigliano's brand of accessible music that appealed to their emotions.

Absolutes and Programs

Corigliano chose to express his ideas about AIDS not just through a symphony, but more specifically through the medium of the program symphony. Franz Liszt (1811-1886) introduced the term "program music" in the 19th century. In some cases, program music might focus on a single character, as in Richard Strauss's (1864-1949) *Don Juan* (1889) and *Don Quixote* (1897). In other instances a work might portray a scene or phenomenon, such as with Claude Debussy's (1862-1918) *La Mer* (1905). For Liszt, the program is "guarding the listener from arbitrary poetic interpretations of his work."⁴⁷ In Liszt's view, listeners should not come to their own interpretations of the meaning of his musical works. Likewise, Corigliano wrote an exceedingly detailed program note (much like Mahler did for his first three symphonies) that guarded the listener from hearing anything other than AIDS.⁴⁸ In 1993 Corigliano reflected back on his program note:

⁴⁷ As quoted in Vera Micznik, "The Absolute Limitations of Programme Music: The Case of Liszt's 'Die Ideale,'" *Music & Letters* 80 (1999): 215.

⁴⁸ For more on the controversies surrounding Mahler's programs, see Barbara R. Barry, "The Hidden Program in Mahler's Fifth Symphony," *Musical Quarterly* 77 (1993): 47-66; and Stephen E. Hefling, "Mahler's 'Todtenfeier' and the Problem of Program Music," *19th Century Music* 12 (1988): 27-53.

I worked hard on the program note because I wanted to lead those in the audience through the journey of how a composer feels things and then builds this thing called a symphony out of it.⁴⁹

Corigliano likewise wanted his program note to guide his listeners through their experience of his symphony, forcing them to confront AIDS and death. He guarded his work from arbitrary (non-AIDS) readings by introducing audiences not just to the musical structure but also to the genesis of his work – his feelings and his friends.

Consistent with the developing practice of “new romanticism,” Corigliano acknowledged the symphonists that came before him. He cited the influence of past composers in the first sentence of his note:

Historically, many symphonists (Berlioz, Mahler, and Shostakovich, to name a few) have been inspired by important events affecting their lives, and perhaps occasionally their choice of symphonic form was dictated by extramusical events. During the past decade I have lost many friends and colleagues to the AIDS epidemic, and the cumulative effect of these losses has, naturally, deeply affected me. My Symphony no. 1 was generated by feelings of loss, anger, and frustration.⁵⁰

He intimates that if you admired the music of Berlioz, Mahler, or Shostakovich, you might develop a comparable appreciation for Symphony no. 1. Corigliano drops these names to legitimate his political project that is not in keeping with typical concert hall practices. That he begins his note comparing his symphony to that of past symphonists suggests a slight – yet understandable – uneasiness about his project. Orchestras are

⁴⁹ Richard Dyer, “A Symphony That Speaks for Millions,” *Boston Globe*, 21 March 1993.

⁵⁰ Corigliano, “Program Note.”

generally reluctant to address political or social causes, and AIDS is no exception.⁵¹

Corigliano's reference to other composers is a defensive move that justifies his choice of program. Previous symphonies had dealt with controversial subjects, but Corigliano anticipates the apprehension to a musical work concerning something as divisive as AIDS.⁵²

There was other evidence of Corigliano's dis-ease with the disease. On multiple occasions he discussed a performance of his symphony in Kiev in the early 1990s in which the audience did not have his program note (he did not explain why).⁵³ He billed

⁵¹ Here is one related example: when the Madison Symphony Orchestra (Madison, Wisc.) solicited pledges for a new pipe organ in 2000, they refused a \$1 million donation from a long-time patron, William Wartmann, because he insisted that the organ include the following dedication:

Let this organ be a voice for the people of the world who have struggled against AIDS and the wave of denial and disinterest that has cost the lives of so many creative souls and cost others the soulful self-realization that might have come had they not shut their hearts and minds to this struggle for fear of being judged.

See Victoria Scanlan Stefanakos, "Sour Note for an AIDS Memorial," *Advocate*, 30 January 2001. I would like to thank David Crook for informing me of this incident.

⁵² In his program note Corigliano also mentioned Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975), who depicted the battle of Leningrad in his Symphony no. 7, "Leningrad," op. 60 (1941) and the massacre of Russian Jews at Babi Yar during World War II in Symphony no. 13, "Babi Yar," op. 113 (1962).

⁵³ See, for example, Robert Croan, "Joy from Sadness: John Corigliano's Memorial to Friends Who Died of AIDS Gets Its PSO Premiere," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 17 March 1995; Jeffrey David Gershman, "'Tarantella' from Symphony no. 1 by John Corigliano: A Transcription for Band" (DMA, University of Texas at Austin, 2002); Benjamin Ivry, "Pulitzer Winner Breaks Boundaries," *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston, Mass.), 4 May 2001; Jay Nordlinger, "From AIDS to Versailles," *Weekly*

this performance simply as a “tragic symphony.” Corigliano has consistently – and incorrectly – stated that Kiev had no reported cases of AIDS, and that the audience could not have understood his symphony as an AIDS symphony.⁵⁴ He claimed that the audience felt “touched by the emotions in the music” and not by AIDS-related feelings.⁵⁵ Then, according to Corigliano, two weeks later the San Francisco Symphony performed Symphony no. 1 and audience members – this time with his program note in hand and AIDS in their community – reacted to it as an AIDS symphony in much the same manner as the Kiev audience. This story suggests that Corigliano wanted to believe that Symphony no. 1 could have the same impact on its listeners without its program note. Corigliano’s frequent telling of this story about the work’s reception in Kiev revealed his discomfort with his extra-musical program and perhaps writing program music at all.

Music = Life?

Corigliano’s note for Symphony no. 1 did more than guide audiences; it filled a particular kind of silence. Although other musicians responded to AIDS before

Standard, 2 December 1996; and Pierre Ruhe, “A Dose of Painting, Poetry and Music in Troubled Times,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 23 September 2001.

⁵⁴ Corigliano may not have seen much evidence of AIDS in Kiev, but the virus had already spread there. Doctors diagnosed the first case of HIV in Kiev in 1987 (and the Ukraine is currently an epicenter in the HIV/AIDS epidemic). See, for example, L. Babenko, “The AIDS Epidemic in the Ukraine,” *SidAlerte* 54-55 (1996): 11.

⁵⁵ Ruhe, “A Dose of Painting.”

Corigliano, none of them produced a “major musical monument” to AIDS.⁵⁶ Corigliano created the first large-scale work addressing AIDS and a renowned orchestra premiered it. A headline in the *Chicago Tribune* read, “Absent Friends: Corigliano Debut Is First Symphony about AIDS.”⁵⁷ The *Denver Post* used the caption, “Top Composer, Orchestra to Present First Major Work Concerning AIDS.”⁵⁸ Both of these newspaper headlines suggested that before Symphony no. 1 composers had not played a role in the cultural construction of AIDS and that major orchestras were silent about AIDS because they had not yet found a voice.

At this point in the history of AIDS (the end of the 1980s), AIDS activists did not condone silence. So-called “new romantic” composers routinely dealt with deeply personal subjects, but before Symphony no. 1 nobody had composed symphonic music that represented rage about AIDS. As discussed in Chapter 1, the phrase Silence = Death had become the most widely recognized slogan concerning the AIDS epidemic, thus Corigliano’s symphony literally filled concert halls with music that expressed his feelings

⁵⁶ Works addressing AIDS before the premiere of Symphony no. 1 include Ronald Roxbury’s *Two Songs of Walt Whitman* (1986), John Adams’s *Wound-Dresser* (1988), and Ben Neill and David Wojnarowicz’s *ITSOFOMO* (1989). Songs from the popular music world included Bronski Beat’s “Dr. John” (1986), Cyndi Lauper’s “Boy Blues” (1986), Prince’s “Sign o’ the Times” (1987), Guns-N-Roses’ “One in a Million” (1988), Boogie Down Productions’ “Jimmy” (1988), and Lou Reed’s “Halloween Parade” (1989).

⁵⁷ von Rhein, “Absent Friends.”

⁵⁸ Jeff Bradley, “Top Composer, Orchestra to Present First Major Work Concerning AIDS,” *Denver Post*, 11 March 1990.

and experiences regarding AIDS. Corigliano made the personal political. Whether he intended it to be or not, Symphony no. 1 became a symbolic response to the call for action contained in the slogan Silence = Death and a reply to Surgeon General C. Everett Koop's plea in *Understanding AIDS* for people to "get involved."⁵⁹

Like the ACT UP protests at the FDA and on Wall Street, Corigliano drew attention to AIDS in a space where that had not happened before, a space that seemed especially apolitical. Since the premiere, more than 115 orchestras have performed Symphony no. 1, bringing Corigliano's anger and grief about AIDS to audiences that AIDS activists did not otherwise target. Corigliano did not view his symphony as "a gay piece or a straight piece, it's a piece about people, whether hemophiliacs, drug addicts, gay or straight. It's a symphony that concerns itself with loss."⁶⁰ Because Corigliano made Symphony no. 1 about more than hemophiliacs, drug addicts, or gay men, he indirectly suggested to his audiences that AIDS affected more than just these groups of people. Much like the members of ACT UP and Surgeon General Koop, Corigliano made the case that AIDS affected everyone in some way.

Corigliano did not model Symphony no. 1 exactly after Silence = Death. The members of ACT UP described their organization as "militant" (perhaps to the dismay of Sontag), carefully organized for the purpose of lowering drug costs, increasing funding

⁵⁹ C. Everett Koop, *Understanding AIDS* (Department of Health & Human Services, 1986).

⁶⁰ Bradley, "Top Composer."

for AIDS research, and reducing discrimination.⁶¹ The media paid attention to ACT UP in part because the actions of the members of ACT UP pushed the boundaries of socially acceptable behavior. Corigliano, in contrast, did not include boorish language in his program note or take to the streets yelling, “Listen to my symphony or die!” Corigliano used his symphony to expand the boundaries of new romanticism, but – to use a phrase familiar to musicians – he made a “well-tempered” presentation. Corigliano employed less controversial methods than ACT UP, and yet he shared many of their goals and conveyed similar messages. Symphony no. 1 carried out its cultural work within the constraints of traditional symphonic conventions. Corigliano pushed the boundaries but ultimately did not disturb them.

Rage and Remembrance

Corigliano titled the first movement “Apologue: Of Rage and Remembrance.” His use of this word “apologue” suggests timelessness and an historical gravitas. In his program note Corigliano defines apologue as “an allegorical narrative usually intended to convey a moral.”⁶² An apologue, like a parable, is didactic. Normally the characters in an apologue come from inanimate nature. Instead, the characters in Corigliano’s narrative

⁶¹ For more on this, see, for example, Jeffrey Edwards, “AIDS, Race, and the Rise and Decline of a Militant Oppositional Lesbian and Gay Politics in the US,” *New Political Science* 22 (2000): 485-506.

⁶² Corigliano, “Program Note.”

are rage and remembrance. Corigliano describes the first movement at length in his program note, though he does not state the moral explicitly.

The high A that begins and ends the movement – and also ends the last movement – enters the narrative as a third potential character. The third character is AIDS itself and the reason for the existence of the symphony. This gesture draws upon convention, as most tonal music begins and ends in the same key area. If one hears the A as AIDS then the moral of the symphony is a warning – that AIDS can collide with our lives, destroy us or the people we love, and then quietly continue in its path of devastation.

Corigliano described the overall structure of the first movement in his program note: “Cast in a free, large-scale A-B-A form, the first movement (Apologue: Of Rage and Remembrance) is highly charged and alternates between the tension of anger and the bittersweet nostalgia of remembering.”⁶³ Throughout the first movement – and the entire symphony, for that matter – Corigliano juxtaposed loud, syncopated melodies that signified rage with softer, conjunct melodies that suggested remembrance. Consistent with the nineteenth-century fascination with the “monumental symphony,”⁶⁴ Corigliano wrote his symphony for a large Mahler-sized orchestra that included piccolo, three flutes,

⁶³ Corigliano, “Program Note.”

⁶⁴ For more on the notion of the monumental symphony, see Daniel K. L. Chua, “On Monuments,” in *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Margaret Notley, “‘Volksconcerte’ in Vienna and Late Nineteenth-Century Ideology of the Symphony,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 50 (1997): 421-53, esp. 432-9.

three oboes, English horn, three clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, six horns, five trumpets, four trombones, two tubas, two timpanists, five or six percussionists, harp, two pianos, and strings. Orchestras can exaggerate the two extremes of emotion in live performances because Corigliano called for such a large group.⁶⁵

In January 1992, *New York Times* music critic Edward Rothstein wrote an unfavorable review, noting, “It has the character not of a first symphony but a first novel.”⁶⁶ The contrasting emotional spaces (A-B-A) provided immediate accessibility for some critics and listeners and were too obvious for others. To Rothstein, who has been generally averse to anything musico-political, the narrative and characters were too blatant: “To show anger and pain, it shouts and screams and harangues in triple-forte rage.”⁶⁷ Two months after Rothstein’s review appeared in *The New York Times*, his similarly politically averse colleague, Bernard Holland, made an analogous point in his review of the symphony in the same newspaper. Holland said that Corigliano had found “vivid pictures in sound for his feelings.” Like Rothstein, Holland felt that Corigliano’s

⁶⁵ Parts of the symphony were so loud that the University of Wisconsin-Madison Orchestra cancelled one scheduled performance out of concern for the hearing of the orchestra musicians who were rehearsing the work in their poorly constructed hall. A special thanks to conductor Blake Walter for sharing the details of these rehearsals.

⁶⁶ Rothstein, “Themes of AIDS.”

⁶⁷ Here is a small sample of Rothstein’s reactions to musico-political interpretations of music: Edward Rothstein, “Is Music Ever Mute on Politics?” *New York Times*, 13 June 1993; “The Politics of Sharps and Flats,” *New York Times*, 17 November 1991; “Program Music, with a Program,” *New York Times*, 26 December 1982; and “What Is the Politics of ‘Tristan’?” *New York Times*, 12 January 1993.

feelings were too transparent, too easily discerned, and he discounted the work as mass-marketed musical “journalism” produced for commercial purposes:

For me, Mr. Corigliano’s symphony speaks in the language of a *New York Daily News* or *New York Post*. From all three, I receive the same quick facts. I trade subtlety for the sudden flash, the bright *bon mot*.⁶⁸

According to Holland, Symphony no. 1 did not compare to the *New York Times*. Holland went on to suggest that “Mr. Corigliano the reporter” provided a “well-written news story, a banner headline, garish illustrations, pointed descriptions.”⁶⁹ These critics seemingly disapproved not of the message of Corigliano’s symphony, but of its means (although the message may have disturbed them, too). Rothstein and Holland – following in the tradition of absolutists like Eduard Hanslick (1825-1904)⁷⁰ – did not like being told what to hear and feel. They questioned a program that guarded a listener’s response to music, especially a program that brought politics into the music.

Composers typically cast the first movements of their symphonies in sonata form, a musical structure that consists of three sections (exposition, development, and recapitulation) and usually employs two main themes. The first movement of Symphony no. 1 consists of three sections with two musical ideas, but it is, nonetheless, only related to sonata form. As Susan McClary has documented, musicians from the mid-nineteenth

⁶⁸ Bernard Holland, “A Symphony in the News Is the News,” *New York Times*, 15 March 1992.

⁶⁹ Holland, “A Symphony in the News.”

⁷⁰ Eduard Hanslick, *On the Beautiful in Music* (Leipzig: 1854).

century to the 1960s regarded the two principal themes in a sonata form as “masculine” and “feminine.”⁷¹ McClary argued that the listener already knew the fates of both themes before the composition even began: the feminine theme would tonally pose a challenge to the absolute authority of the masculine theme, but the masculine theme would ultimately prevail. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, themes not stated in the tonic (i.e., unstable) represented the “feminine” and needed to be restrained, according to McClary. In the first movement of Symphony no. 1, where Corigliano changed the names of the opposing themes to rage and remembrance, we might expect the story to be essentially the same, with loud rage deemed masculine as opposed to the soft feminism of remembrance, nostalgia, and the caring quilt. With or without McClary in mind, Corigliano prepares his listeners to hear the masculine rage overpower the feminine remembrance: A-B-A.

Corigliano makes it easy to hear the differences between the A and B sections. He marks the A (rage) sections with dissonance, sudden dynamic shifts, a recurring three-note pattern (B-flat–D–E), and a steady pulse. The first A section concludes when the entire orchestra plays a *fff* chord in m. 65. After the orchestra decrescendos, an offstage piano enters in m. 80 and its *ppp* melody provides a sharp contrast to the loud, dissonant opening and clearly indicates a move to the B (remembrance) section. The offstage piano

⁷¹ Susan McClary, “Narrative Agendas in ‘Absolute’ Music: Identity and Difference in Brahms’s Third Symphony,” in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

directly quotes one of Shkolnik's (the dedicatee) favorite pieces, Leopold Godowsky's transcription of Isaac Albéniz's *Tango in D* (1921). In this case musical borrowing does not only represent Corigliano's acceptance of past musical traditions; instead, by quoting an eroticized dance form Corigliano gives this movement a sexual connotation that suggests an intimate relationship with Shkolnik.⁷²

The offstage timbre of the piano occupies a separate musical space and a separate physical space, guiding the listener from one musical segment to another. The effect is reminiscent of the dialogue between the cor anglais and oboe in the third movement of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, as well as the offstage trumpets in Mahler's Symphony no. 1 and Symphony no. 2. The offstage piano and orchestra of Corigliano's symphony occupy different physical spaces, and yet they are closely connected to each other. Roger Scruton describes the offstage trumpets in Mahler's first two symphonies in his book, *Aesthetics of Music*:

[The trumpets] are meant to evoke a sense of distance: but it is a distance of the imagination; these trumpets call to us from far away, and also from within, like

⁷² For more on eroticism and the tango, see, for example, Susan C. Cook, "Passionless Dancing and Passionate Reform: Respectability, Modernism, and the Social Dancing of Irene and Vernon Castle," in *The Passion of Music and Dance: Body, Gender and Sexuality*, ed. William Washabaugh (New York: Berg, 1998); Cook, "Tango Lizards and Girlish Men: Performing Masculinity on the Social Dance Floor," in *Proceedings of the Society of Dance History Scholars, Conference at Barnard College* (1997); and Marta E. Savigliano, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995).

the voices of the dead; their “distance” is metaphorical, and they are as present in the musical structure as the other sounds with which they coincide.⁷³

The offstage piano in Symphony no. 1 is likewise relegated to the outside – suggesting not only death, but also a society that stigmatizes people with AIDS.

Initially, Corigliano concludes the first movement by suggesting hope, but in the end he offers an urgent warning. In Corigliano’s program note he sets up his listeners to expect the masculine rage section to be victorious, but it is not. After the *Tango*’s initial appearance in mm. 80-103, it briefly returns in mm. 125-128, only to be drowned out by the strings. The arrival of the timpani in m. 180 sounds like the beginning of the return of the A section as the aggressive rage slowly overcomes the consonant remembrance. But the final coda-like bars of the symphony betray Corigliano’s A-B-A form and are semiotically much more characteristic of the B (remembrance) section than the A (rage) section. The offstage piano returns near the end of the symphony, and the movement concludes much as it began, with a high A played in the quiet upper strings. Feminine remembrance tempers the masculine rage, but not the A(IDS).

Voyeur

Typically the second movement of a symphony is slow and the third movement is a dance movement, such as a Scherzo or Minuet (in eighteenth-century symphonies). The slow movement did not always come before the dance movement, however, as composers

⁷³ Roger Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 12.

sometimes reversed the second and third movements in works such as Beethoven's Symphony no. 9 (1824), Mendelssohn's Symphony no. 3, "Scottish" (1842), Mahler's Symphony no. 4 (1900), and Jean Sibelius's Symphony no. 5 (1915). Like these symphonies, Corigliano's second movement "Tarantella" has the characteristics of a dance and the third movement, marked *adagio* in the score, functions as the slow movement of the symphony.

Corigliano dedicated the second movement "Tarantella" to Jack Romann, the former head of Baldwin Pianos and an amateur pianist (the unnamed "executive in the music industry" that Corigliano mentioned in the program note).⁷⁴ In 1970 Corigliano dedicated the "Tarantella" movement of his *Gazebo Dances* for piano four-hands to Romann; by the late 1980s Romann suffered from dementia due to AIDS, and he died in 1988.⁷⁵ In the program note Corigliano explained the dedication and discussed the programmatic significance of the tarantella dance:

For the tarantella, as described in *Grove's Dictionary of Music*, is a "South Italian dance played at continually increasing speed [and] by means of dancing it a strange kind of insanity [attributed to tarantula bite] could be cured." The association of madness and my piano piece proved both prophetic and bitterly ironic when my friend, whose wit and intelligence were legendary in the music field, became insane as a result of AIDS dementia.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Corigliano does not name Romann in his program note, but he does in Gershman, "'Tarantella' from Symphony no. 1," 37.

⁷⁵ Gershman, "'Tarantella' from Symphony no. 1," 12.

⁷⁶ Corigliano, "Program Note."

Corigliano's choice of dance is an optimistic gesture because it represents a curative dance, even though there is no cure for AIDS.

Corigliano explained further that the tarantella movement "is a slow and relentless progression toward an accelerated 'madness.'"⁷⁷ Corigliano represented dementia with chords and melodies – he composed the "sound" of AIDS wrecking havoc on the rational mind. The second movement of Symphony no. 1 evoked the lengthy tradition of music concerning "madness" and "disease." Throughout notated musical history, from Monteverdi to Donizetti to Berlioz to Schoenberg and beyond, composers have represented disease and madness in music – especially in opera, but in instrumental music as well.⁷⁸ The second movement of Symphony no. 1 brings to mind the corruption of Faust by Mephistopheles in the third movement of Liszt's *Faust Symphonie* (1854) or the opium-induced visions of the main character in the "Witches' Sabbath" movement of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* (1830).⁷⁹ Corigliano, like Berlioz, projected his own experiences into his music. Corigliano's second movement not only portrayed madness; it

⁷⁷ Corigliano, "Program Note."

⁷⁸ For more on madness and music, with a special emphasis on women in opera, see Susan McClary, "Excess and Frame: The Musical Representation of Madwomen," in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

⁷⁹ There is at least one place in the tarantella movement that actually sounds like *Symphonie Fantastique*: when the E-flat Clarinet enters in m. 132, it is reminiscent of the famous E-flat clarinet solo presenting the distorted version of the *idée fixe* near the beginning of the fifth movement of *Symphonie fantastique*.

represents the mental health problems that could develop when a person contracts the AIDS virus.

Corigliano wrote that the movement “is formally less organized than the preceding one” – a fitting representation of madness.⁸⁰ Although he claims that he did not organize this movement as strictly as the previous one, he employed a conventional, recognizable form. He modeled the movement, in part, on the traditional tarantella, which the latest version of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* defined as “a regularly phrased tune in 3/8 or 6/8 that alternates between major and minor mode and gradually increases in speed.”⁸¹ Corigliano adopted a similar alternating pattern that accelerated, except his two musical ideas were not based on major and minor modes. The time signature changed frequently, but Corigliano most often set it in triple meter, such as 9/8 or 6/8.

Figure 9 shows the form of the movement, which Corigliano labels a “slow and relentless progression toward an accelerated ‘madness’”.⁸²

⁸⁰ Corigliano, “Program Note.”

⁸¹ Erich Schwandt, “Tarantella,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001).

⁸² Much of my analysis of this movement is based on Gershman, “‘Tarantella’ from Symphony no. 1.”

Figure 9. Corigliano, Symphony no. 1, 2nd Movement “Tarantella”

SECTION	MEASURES
A	1-20
B	21-38
A	39-110
B	111-168
A	169-202
B	203-244
A	245-295

The A sections contrast the B sections in that the A sections move with a more pronounced (deliberate) rhythm. As shown in figure 10, the first A section is brief – just long enough to establish a pulse – and includes a syncopated pattern that recurs throughout much of the second movement:

Figure 10. Corigliano, Symphony no. 1, , 2nd Movement, mm. 5-15

The image displays two staves of musical notation for Violin 1 and Violin 2, covering measures 5 through 15. The time signature is 8/8. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The music features a syncopated rhythmic pattern, with notes often starting on the off-beat. The dynamic marking *p* (piano) is present at the beginning of the first staff. The notation includes various note values, rests, and slurs, illustrating the characteristic pulse of the A section.

The first B section of the Tarantella begins in m. 21, and Corigliano indicates in the score that the melodies should be “dreamlike.”⁸³ In these B sections, Corigliano’s notation is diverse and at times imprecise. For example, in m. 26 the clarinet and flute parts each have a different number of unequally spaced black note heads without stems, as shown in figure 11.

Figure 11. Corigliano, Symphony no. 1, 2nd Movement, mm. 25-26, flute & clarinet.



In fact, Corigliano uses a variety of unconventional compositional techniques for other B sections in this movement: in mm. 227-244 he uses headless note stems; near the

⁸³ John Corigliano, *Symphony no. 1* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1990), 55.

conclusion of the movement he replaces note heads with an X or a triangle; and for the glissando chord that ends the movement, he uses triangle note heads and instructs the instruments to play the highest note possible. These techniques, which Corigliano has called “controlled aleatoric music,” provide the orchestra musicians with limited guidance and allow for a variety of creative interpretations.⁸⁴

When the clarinet enters again in m. 39 to begin the second A section, many of the pitches in the melody are similar – not the same – as the notes in the melody the clarinet played previously in mm. 25-26, but the time signature changes back to 6/8 and Corigliano returns to conventional notation. The rhythm signifies the return to the A section. The rhythmic, seven-measure clarinet theme (as shown in figure 12) is present throughout much of the movement, in both the A and B sections: the oboe repeats the theme in a duet with the clarinet in mm. 47-53; the E-flat clarinet and piccolo play it in mm. 131-139; the clarinet and oboe have it in mm. 168-179 and mm. 183-187 (both of these times the full statement of it is cut short); it appears in the trombone starting in m. 226; the horn has it beginning in m. 233; and the percussion play it starting at the end of m. 244. Although Corigliano includes this theme (in figure 12) in both the A and the B sections, he sets it strictly in the A sections and freely in the B sections. This theme probably represents Romann moving in and out of sanity. The back and forth between the rational, rhythmic A sections and the uncontrolled dreamlike B sections is one way that

⁸⁴ As quoted in Gershman, “‘Tarantella’ from Symphony no. 1,” 47.

this movement represents Romann's madness. And yet, without the program, the mood might not be so unsettling.

Figure 12. John Corigliano, Symphony no. 1, mm. 39-46.



This formal structure in this movement again reveals Corigliano's reliance on established musical traditions. In part due to its alternating structure, the second movement of Corigliano's Symphony no. 1 recalls the second movement of Beethoven's Symphony no. 3, "Marcia funebre" ("Funeral March"). Each movement is a kind of rondo, although Beethoven's movement of course follows the traditional model more closely. The rondo structure of the "Marcia funebre," shown in figure 13, can roughly be represented as ABACA-Coda. As Lewis Lockwood notes, "No textbook formal scheme fits this expansive movement, yet its large-scale statement, counterstatement, and return, fit the current patterns of Beethoven's larger slow movements well enough."⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Lewis Lockwood, *Beethoven: The Music and the Life* (New York: Norton, 2003), 208.

Figure 13. Beethoven, Symphony no. 3 “Eroica,” 2nd Movement

SECTION	MEASURES
A	1-68
B	69-104
A	105-113
C	114-172
A	173-208
Coda	209-247

In addition to being structurally similar, both movements represent an admired person “in motion” and both concern death – Beethoven’s work represents the sequence of a funeral and Corigliano’s work represents “accelerated madness.” Further, the ascending and descending triplet figures played by the bassoon and 2nd violin in mm. 8, 10, 12, and 14 of the “Tarantella” are reminiscent of the triplet figures played in the bass in the first three measures of “Marcia funebre.” Whereas Beethoven depicted the funeral progression of a fallen hero, Corigliano wrote that Romann’s “wit and intelligence were legendary in the music field,” and he represented the progression of Romann’s illness. Both Beethoven and Corigliano wrote urgent music, heavy on principle, and both described their dedicatees with grandiose terminology like “legendary” and “hero.”⁸⁶

⁸⁶ For additional information on gender and the notion of the “heroic” in Beethoven’s music, see, for example, Matthew Head, “Beethoven Heroine: A Female Allegory of Music and Authorship in *Egmont*,” *19th Century Music* 30 (2006): 97-132. See also Scott Burnham, *Beethoven Hero* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) ;

By representing dementia musically, Corigliano makes his symphony a powerful tool for AIDS activism. In Sander Gilman's discussion of the visual images of AIDS, he suggests that AIDS art can be comforting precisely because it represents something unlike us:

It is in this world of representations that we banish our fear of disease; isolating it as surely as if we had placed it on a desert island. And yet in this isolation, these icons remain alive and visible to all of us, proof that we are still whole, healthy, and sane; that we are not different, diseased, or mad.⁸⁷

The second movement of Symphony no. 1 is a portal into the madness caused by AIDS, but like the offstage piano in the first movement, it keeps AIDS at a distance. Like many representations of AIDS and earlier descriptions of madness, the second movement constructs AIDS as Other. More precisely, in this movement AIDS = madness. The back and forth between the measured A sections and the dreamlike B sections represent madness, a madness that we as voyeurs can comprehend but cannot contract. We observe the madness and value our own sanity. Like the works of art that Gilman describes, we can "banish" this movement, isolating it and AIDS as an unrecognizable Other.⁸⁸

and Sanna Pederson, "Beethoven and Masculinity," in *Beethoven and His World*, ed. Scott Burnham and Michael P. Steinberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁸⁷ Sander Gilman, *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 271-2.

⁸⁸ For another perspective on AIDS as Other, see Evelyn M. Hammonds, "Race, Sex, AIDS: The Construction of Other," *Radical America* 20, no. 6 (1986): 28-36.

Chaconne & Epilogue

Corigliano made his third movement, “Chaconne: Giulio’s Song,” another dance movement. Common features of the chaconne include triple meter, serious character, and a ground bass.⁸⁹ In the first movement Corigliano featured an offstage piano to memorialize his friend Sheldon Shkolnik, and similarly in the third movement Corigliano employed a solo cello to recall his college friend, an amateur cellist named Giulio Sorrentino, and others.⁹⁰ In the program note, Corigliano called the musical themes in the movement an “interweaving of lost friends.”⁹¹ Corigliano derived some of the melodies from a taped improvisation session in 1962 in which Sorrentino played cello and Corigliano played piano. Corigliano added eight other melodies based on short sentences written by his friend William Hoffman (the librettist for *The Ghosts of Versailles*) that eulogized Corigliano’s other HIV-positive friends. Corigliano set these texts to melodies and then removed the texts.⁹²

⁸⁹ For a good overview of the history of the chaconne, see Richard Hudson, “Further Remarks on the Passacaglia and Ciaccona,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 23 (1970): 302-14; and Thomas Walker, “Ciaccona and Passacaglia: Remarks on Their Origin and Early History,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 21 (1968): 300-20. For an example of a chaconne used in a symphony, see Raymond Knapp, “The Finale of Brahms’s Fourth Symphony: The Tale of the Subject,” *19th Century Music* 13 (1989): 3-17.

⁹⁰ Gershman, “‘Tarantella’ from Symphony no. 1,” 10.

⁹¹ Corigliano, “Program Note.”

⁹² Corigliano, “Program Note.”

Corigliano assembled the third movement as a kind of sonic photo album. While he does not discuss any of the dedicatees in the program note, Corigliano did not keep their names secret, marking each dissonant melody in the score with “Fortunato Arico, ‘cellist,” “Paul Jacobs, pianist,” etc. The first solo cello presents Giulio’s melody, and like many of the themes in Symphony no. 1, it is dissonant, and the chaconne bass conveys an ambiguous tonality. For example, the solo cello plays all twelve tones between m. 24 and m. 30 over a tonal-sounding B-flat and D. This music is what Leonard Meyer, Jonathan Kramer, and others have called “non-teleological” – music with a structure that is “vertical” rather than “linear.”⁹³ At m. 40 another solo cello joins, representing Giulio Sorrentino’s cello teacher, Fortunato Arico. The second cello solo, like the first, incorporates all twelve tones. The two cellos play together, sometimes unaccompanied and other times over a soft string accompaniment. Corigliano composed each of the seven melodies for a different instrument: the English horn plays pianist Paul Jacobs’s melody; a clarinet plays a melody for editor J. J. Mitchell; Corigliano represents director Jacques Chwat with a melody in the horn; the trombones play a duet for computer designer Mark Pearson and “coach-accompanist” Jim Moses (presumably a couple); Corigliano memorializes “writer-critic” Robert Jacobson with a melody in the oboes; and the flutes play the final melody, dedicated to stage director Nikos Kafkalis.

⁹³ Leonard B. Meyer, “On Rehearing Music,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 14 (1961): 267; and Jonathan D. Kramer, “New Temporalities in Music,” *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1981): 550-51.

The fourth and final movement is the shortest (64 measures) and enters “attacca” after the third movement. There is historical precedence for ending third and fourth movements this way – Beethoven’s Symphony no. 5 (1809), Mahler’s Symphony no. 1 (1888), and Shostakovich’s Symphony no. 1 (1925) are just a few examples. Also like many earlier symphonies, the fourth movement of Symphony no. 1 recalls themes from its previous movements. After a series of descending chords in the brass, the offstage piano returns with the Albéniz *Tango* of the first movement, the clarinet sounds the Tarantella melody of second movement, and the solo cellos recap their melodies from the third movement. Returning to previous melodies is a common way to end a symphony. And like a conventional symphony that begins and ends in the same key (usually the tonic), Corigliano ends this symphony much like it began, with an A.

Corigliano tells a different story in each movement. The first movement is especially effective as a form of AIDS activism because it uses a musical form and language that audiences could readily identify to demonstrate how AIDS elicited strong emotions. The A-B-A form is easy to follow even though it deviates slightly from the pattern at the conclusion. Corigliano is cognizant of history, anchoring his symphony in the past through musical borrowing (from Albéniz) and other symphonic conventions. Intensely personal, it both reflects Corigliano’s own feelings and invites the audience to share in his anger. The A at the onset and conclusion likely signifies the tiny, cruel, heartless AIDS virus that can exact such terror. This movement has all the trappings of new romanticism – with the added warning that AIDS kills.

The “Tarantella” predictably fails in its mission to provide a cure for AIDS. Corigliano begins one musical idea only to abruptly cut it off by another, often in violent fashion. The result suggests the incoherent ramblings of a person with AIDS Dementia Complex, one of the most common complications affecting people in the terminal stage of AIDS.⁹⁴ Corigliano explains that the changing textures are not just changes in tempo and volume, but rather “schizophrenic and hallucinatory images,” and the final chord is not a just a glissando sforzando, but a “brutal scream.”⁹⁵

The melodies in the third movement provide another aural reference to the AIDS Quilt. The “Chaconne” movement of Symphony no. 1 is like one of the larger square sections of the AIDS Quilt, which the NAMES Project sometimes calls “blocks” (see figure 14). Each block is 12 X 12 feet and incorporates eight quilt panels. That Corigliano chose to represent eight additional friends in this movement is likely a specific rendering of the AIDS Quilt, given his program.

⁹⁴ See, for example, Igor Grant, Ned Sacktor, and Justin McArthur, “HIV Neurocognitive Disorders,” in *Neurology of AIDS*, ed. Howard E. Gendelman, et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Richard W. Price and Samuel W. Perry, eds., *HIV, AIDS, and the Brain* (New York: Raven Press, 1994).

⁹⁵ Corigliano, “Program Note.”

Figure 14. Eight-panel “blocks” from the AIDS Quilt (photos, Library of Congress and National Institute of Health).



To describe the last movement of his symphony in his program note, Corigliano introduces a new metaphor:

To me, the sound of ocean waves conveys an image of timelessness. I wanted to suggest that in this Symphony by creating sonic “waves.” To help achieve this, I have partially encircled with orchestra with an expanded brass section in the back. Against these waves, the piano solo from the first movement (the Albéniz/Godowsky *Tango*) returns, as does the tarantella melody (this time sounding distant and peaceful), and the two solo cellos interwoven between, recapitulate their dialogue. A slow *diminuendo* leaves the solo cello holding the same perpetual A, finally fading away.⁹⁶

His choice of words like “timeless” and “perpetual” again harkens back to the nineteenth century and musical monuments. The sonic waves, played by the brass, are descending

⁹⁶ Corigliano, “Program Note.”

figures that suggest a slow descent towards death, and the last note of the symphony – that final A played in a solo cello – is yet another *aide memoire* that AIDS continues in our own time.

Elegiac or Activist?

Chapter 1 mentioned viewpoints regarding elegiac and activist AIDS art and described some of the public forms of activism that occurred at the same time as Corigliano wrote his symphony. Many people with AIDS dislike the label “victim” and Corigliano, out of respect, avoided the term “victim.” Symphony no. 1 did not concern itself with AIDS “victims,” it memorialized people with AIDS. It did not rely on the bloody scare tactics used in more obviously activist AIDS art, and yet it still got angry. Although AIDS art often seemed to fit into one of two categories – elegiac (represented by the AIDS Quilt) and activist (represented by the visual images of ACT UP) – Symphony no. 1 did not fit neatly into either category. Like its first movement, Symphony no. 1 moved back and forth between the extremes of rage and remembrance. In the *Advocate* article discussed at the onset of this chapter, Corigliano stressed the power of his symphony in the fight against AIDS and its potential as an agent for change. Elsewhere Corigliano discussed his work as an AIDS memorial based on the AIDS Memorial Quilt.

Corigliano created awareness of the “madness” he had seen firsthand, and yet he also kept the “madness” at a distance. Corigliano did not describe his symphony using sexually explicit language in his program note, however, the presence of dances,

especially the tango, revealed a sexual intimacy. He blended the features of elegiac art and activist art to create a different kind of activist art in keeping with the conventions of Rochberg, Zwilich, and other new romantics. His symphony revealed Corigliano's emotions, but it did not insult. Corigliano pushed boundaries without being explicitly sexual and confrontational. Like Diamanda Galás's *Plague Mass* and Gran Fury's art, Corigliano used his symphony to express his anger. However, Corigliano tempered his angry "scream" with quiet, contemplative sections.

Deanna Sellnow and Timothy Sellnow (both professors of communication at North Dakota State University) attribute even more potential to Symphony no. 1, suggesting not only that listeners will understand the messages in Symphony no. 1, but also that when hearing the first movement, "it is likely that listeners will be overcome by rage about the AIDS crisis."⁹⁷ The Sellnows argue that Corigliano accomplishes this feat because his work associates itself with a previously articulated premise – "that AIDS, not its victims, is the adversary."⁹⁸ They argue that Corigliano presents persuasive ideas to compassionate audiences. That the Sellnows could attribute such influence to a symphony is a testament to its power to influence musicians, but also to influence non-musicians who perhaps know less about musical form and the history of music. The

⁹⁷ Deanna D. Sellnow and Timothy L. Sellnow, "John Corigliano's 'Symphony No. 1' as a Communicative Medium for the AIDS Crisis," *Communication Studies* 44 (1993): 95.

⁹⁸ Sellnow and Sellnow, "Communicative Medium for the AIDS Crisis," 100.

Sellnows evaluate Symphony no. 1 using rudimentary musico-analytical tools, but in doing so they offer another testament to Corigliano's accessible musical language and to the perceived clout of this instrumental work.

Corigliano drew from both extremes of activism and elegy and produced an effective AIDS-awareness-raising tool. He made the symphony hall no longer a place where one could go to forget about AIDS – at least not always. When orchestras programmed Symphony no. 1, AIDS took center stage. *New York Times* critic Bernard Holland put it well when he noted that Corigliano showed his skill for “making us reconsider traditions.”⁹⁹ Building on the well-established genre of the program symphony and the conventions of new romanticism, Corigliano made a point, but he did it without being too forceful musically or extramusically.

Corigliano rarely used words like “activist” to describe this work, but in interviews he indicated that he saw it this way. For example, he noted in 1995, “it’s important for people to understand that it’s *also* a symphony” – suggesting that audiences might understand Symphony no. 1 more as an AIDS work or as AIDS activism than as a symphony.¹⁰⁰ In another interview, he went beyond describing his symphony and hinted at what it might accomplish:

Part of the greatness of music is its non-specificness. Without words, classical music is not threatening. My symphony has been played in very conservative

⁹⁹ Holland, “A Symphony in the News.”

¹⁰⁰ Croan, “Joy from Sadness” (emphasis added).

places and it gets through where words don't – to people who would never go to see a play or even a ballet about AIDS.¹⁰¹

In this statement Corigliano sounds like an AIDS activist, because like the members of ACT UP, he wants to get people thinking about AIDS.

He understands that part of the cultural work his symphony does takes place outside of the concert halls. Corigliano is visible in the community before performances. "I'm always going out to speak to people, before concerts, to the press, to students," he acknowledged.¹⁰² He has continued to raise AIDS awareness in other ways. For example, after the events of September 11, 2001, Corigliano wrote an article for the *New York Times* with the provocative title, "We Are All AIDS Sufferers." In this piece he compared responses to AIDS with reactions to the events of September 11, 2001, suggesting, "our responses to each vary less than you might think. As in the early stages of AIDS, we are still searching to define an enemy so that we can understand and defeat it."¹⁰³ Through these actions and others, Corigliano has enhanced the public's awareness of the connections between Symphony no. 1 and AIDS activism.

¹⁰¹ Nordlinger, "From AIDS to Versailles."

¹⁰² Croan, "Joy from Sadness." He continues to speak in the community about HIV/AIDS when orchestras perform Symphony no. 1. For example, the Montreal Symphony Orchestra performed Symphony no. 1 on February 17 and 18, 2004, and Corigliano gave a lecture at Concordia University in Montreal on February 16. See "Composer John Corigliano Speaks on HIV/AIDS," *Concordia's Thursday Report*, 12 February 2004.

¹⁰³ John Corigliano, "We Are All AIDS Sufferers," *New York Times*, 23 September 2001.

The idea that “AIDS is not my problem,” according to Douglas Crimp in 1994, “is without question the most widespread, the most tenacious, and the most dangerous formulation in this pandemic.”¹⁰⁴ Corigliano made AIDS a “problem” for his audience. What Jay Nordlinger, the managing editor of the *National Review*, cited as Symphony no. 1’s “obvious flaw,” actually turned out to be its greatest strength: “The symphony at times seems intended to accompany something larger, rather than being a complete thing in itself.”¹⁰⁵ This symphony joined the much larger project of raising AIDS awareness at all levels of society, and it expressed its ideas in the accessible language and program of new romanticism. He presented his own artful response to AIDS, and through his clear musical choices demanded his audiences responded in whatever way they found appropriate.

¹⁰⁴ Crimp, *Melancholia*, 259.

¹⁰⁵ Nordlinger, “From AIDS to Versailles.”

Chapter 3

Positive Music: Race, Gender, and AIDS in TLC's "Waterfalls"

The last chapter demonstrated that Corigliano's Symphony no. 1 raised awareness of AIDS in the familiar language of new romanticism whereas this chapter reveals how TLC used a popular song and music video, "Waterfalls" (LaFace/Arista, 1994), employing a musical language typical of American popular music to draw the public's attention to AIDS. TLC released "Waterfalls," written by Marqueze Etheridge,¹ on their album *CrazySexyCool* shortly after the first blockbuster movie about AIDS, Jonathan Demme's *Philadelphia* (Tristar, 1993).² "Waterfalls" and this well-known Hollywood movie are both markers of changing attitudes about the place of AIDS in culture and indicators of the growing mainstream acceptance of AIDS that began to occur during those years.

¹ Other people who contributed to the words and music of "Waterfalls" are Lisa Nicole Lopes, Rico R. Wade, Pat Brown, and Ramon Murray. See MTV, *Selections from 100 Greatest Pop Songs* (Milwaukee, Wisc.: Hal Leonard), 448.

² Though not the first, *Philadelphia* remains the best-known American movie concerning AIDS. Other American HIV/AIDS-related movies before it are numerous, including: John Erman's *An Early Frost* (NBC, 1985), Arthur J. Bressan Jr.'s *Buddies* (New Line Cinema, 1985), Bill Sherwood's *Parting Glances* (Cinecom International, 1986), Jeffrey Friedman's Academy Award-winning *Common Threads* (Telling Pictures, 1989), and Norman René's *Longtime Companion* (American Playhouse, 1990).

For a more detailed discussion of AIDS and television, see Kylo-Patrick R. Hart, *The AIDS Movie: Representing a Pandemic in Film and Television* (New York: Haworth Press, 2000); Pilipp and Shull, "TV Movies of the First Decade of AIDS"; Paula A. Treichler, "AIDS Narratives on Television: Whose Story?" in *Writing AIDS: Gay Literature, Language, and Analysis*, ed. Timothy F. Murphy and Suzanne Poirier (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); and Treichler, "Seduced and Terrorized: AIDS and Network Television," *Artforum* 28, no. 2 (1992): 147-51.

Between 1988, when Corigliano saw the AIDS Quilt and first decided to compose Symphony no. 1, and 1994, when TLC released “Waterfalls,” many Americans started realizing that the catchphrase “gay plague” did not adequately define AIDS. Even though TLC made no direct references to HIV or AIDS in “Waterfalls,” TLC’s warning messages about unprotected sex obviously suggested AIDS. This chapter will show how TLC, like Corigliano, eschewed the militant techniques favored by other AIDS activists and further contested the cultural construction of AIDS within the constraints of their creative medium, American hip-hop and R&B.

Background

TLC remains one of the top-selling female recording groups in American history. In 1991, producer/singer/songwriter Perri “Pebbles” McKissak brought together Tionne “T-Boz” Watkins (b. 1970), Lisa “Left Eye” Lopes (1971-2002), and Crystal Jones (b. 1970) and formed the hip-hop and R&B group 2nd Nature.³ Shortly thereafter they changed their name to TLC. Based on the acronym from their first names, the new name evoked the feminine aphorism “Tender Loving Care.” When Rozonda Thomas (b. 1971) replaced Crystal Jones, Rozonda adopted the nickname “Chilli” so the acronym would still work.

³ Gillian G. Gaar, *She’s a Rebel: The History of Women in Rock & Roll* (New York: Seal Press, 2002), 423.

TLC succeeded from the start. In 1992 they released their first album *Ooooooohhh.... On the TLC Tip* to critical acclaim and eventually platinum certification by the Recording Industry of America.⁴ Critics identified TLC as feminists succeeding in an industry dominated by men and judged *Ooooooohhh.... On the TLC Tip* as “a major breakthrough in the expression of black female sexuality.”⁵ While producers, including Dallas Austin and Jermaine Dupri, wrote many of the songs on the album for them, Lisa Lopes co-wrote more than half of the songs. On “Hat 2 Da Back” Lopes asserted her independence with lyrics such as “nobody can make me do what I don’t want to.” TLC’s songs – from *TLC Tip* as well as subsequent albums – covered topics ranging from love to female self-esteem to critiques of abusive relationships. *New York Times* critic Jon Pareles described the members of TLC “as both agents and objects of desire” and ethnomusicologist Cheryl Keyes attached the label “Fly Girls” to TLC because of TLC’s awareness of their erotic selves, their independent personas, and their “safe sex” messages.⁶ The women of TLC were not passive sex objects – they were sexy and

⁴ For more on this album’s success, see, for example, Richard Harrington, “TLC Finds Success in Safe-Sex Message,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, 11 February 1993; “Turning Protection into Platinum: TLC Heats up the Charts with Its Safe-Sex Sounds,” *Washington Post*, 31 December 1992; and Lenny Stoute, “Fun-Feminist TLC Trio Rappin’ on Boyz Door,” *Toronto Star*, 30 July 1992.

⁵ Nataki H. Goodall, “Depend on Myself: T.L.C. and the Evolution of Black Female Rap,” *Journal of Negro History* 79 (1994): 85.

⁶ Jon Pareles, “Love Songs With No Tomorrows,” *New York Times*, 12 February 1995. The term “fly girl” dates back to the 1960s. Cheryl Lynette Keyes used it to

confident. TLC disbanded after Lisa Lopes tragically died in a car accident in 2002 in Honduras.⁷

Waterfalls Background

In November 1994 TLC released their second album, *CrazySexyCool*, which included “Waterfalls.” Although they teamed up with Dallas Austin, Babyface, and Jermaine Dupri, “the girls [*sic*] took the lead in decisions about what would and what would not be on the album.”⁸ The name *CrazySexyCool* came from Lopes, who believed that the three adjectives summed up the various aspects of the female personality.⁹ The

describe TLC in her article “Empowering Self, Making Choices, Creating Spaces: Black Female Identity Via Rap Music Performance,” *Journal of American Folklore* 113 (2000): 260-1.

⁷ Jon Pareles, “Lisa Lopes, Rapper, Dies in Honduras Crash at 30,” *New York Times*, 27 April 2002.

In 2005 T-Boz and Chilli hosted a reality TV show titled, “R U the Girl? With T-Boz & Chilli.” The show premiered on 27 July 2005 on UPN and the season finale aired on 20 September 2005. For more on the show, see Nellie Andreeva, “TLC to Audition Singers in UPN Reality Show ‘R U the Girl,’” *Chicago Sun-Times*, 17 November 2004.

As of February 2007, T-Boz runs a children’s clothing store in Houston, TX called Chase’s Closet (www.chasescloset.com) and there are unconfirmed rumors on numerous Web sites, including wikipedia.com, chillifan.com, and middlechildpromotions.com, that Chilli will soon be releasing a new solo album.

⁸ Nancy Krulik, *Lisa Lopes: The Life of a Supernova* (New York: Simon Pulse, 2002), 20-1.

⁹ Oprah Winfrey generated massive attention for AIDS when she did a story about men “on the down low.” Coincidentally, another song from *CrazySexyCool*, “Creep,” helped popularize the phrase “on the down low.” Although J. L. King does not mention TLC in his book, TLC, with Brian McKnight and R. Kelly, helped popularize the term

album sold more than ten million copies, qualifying it for Diamond certification from the Recording Industry of Association of America.¹⁰ *CrazySexyCool* won Grammy Awards in 1996 for best R&B album and best R&B performance by a duo or group.¹¹ In 1995 “Waterfalls” occupied the no. 1 spot on the *Billboard* charts for seven weeks and the “Waterfalls” video won the MTV award for “Best Video of the Year.”¹² As a further indication of its widespread recognition, this song had the distinction of being subsequently parodied by “Weird Al” Yankovich in 1996.¹³

The second verse of “Waterfalls” addresses AIDS without using explicit references to HIV or AIDS:

Little precious has a natural obsession
 For temptation but he just can't see
 She gives him loving that his body can't handle
 But all he can say is baby it's good to me
 One day he goes and takes a glimpse in the mirror
 But he doesn't recognize his own face
 His health is fading and he doesn't know why
 Three letters took him to his final resting place

“on the down low.” J. L. King, *On the Down Low: A Journey into the Lives of “Straight” Black Men Who Sleep With Men* (New York: Broadway Books, 2004).

¹⁰ Gaar, *She's a Rebel*, 423.

¹¹ Pareles, “Lisa Lopes.”

¹² Brett Atwood, “TLC Video Director Gray Has Waterfalls of Offers,” *Billboard*, 14 October 1995.

¹³ Yankovich's version of the song, “Phony Calls,” avoided the subject of HIV/AIDS altogether. Weird Al Yankovic, “Phony Calls,” *Bad Hair Day* (Scotti Bros., 1996).

Words and phrases in this verse, such as “temptation,” “loving,” “body,” “health,” and “three letters,” all point to AIDS. The line “three letters took him to his final resting place” reflects society’s general uneasiness and confusion with AIDS. Presumably the three letters are S-E-X or H-I-V, but the letters are not named – neither “seen” nor heard. We cannot see the three letters, and likewise the man “can’t see” and he “doesn’t recognize.” Other lyrics reinforce the connection to HIV/AIDS. “She gives him loving that his body can’t handle” could have a number of meanings, but in this context we understand that the man contracts H-I-V through unprotected S-E-X with the woman. The phrase “one day he goes and takes a glimpse in the mirror” reveals that some time had passed before he noticed any changes to his body, consistent with the fact that most people with HIV do not develop AIDS until many years after becoming infected. “His health is fading” strongly indicates that the man’s body has become infected as a result of his contact with the woman.¹⁴

The lyrics of “Waterfalls” were key to the success of the song because those “three letters” left a great deal open to interpretation.¹⁵ In chat rooms and informal

¹⁴ Incidentally, the chorus of TLC’s “Waterfalls” – “Don’t go chasing waterfalls, please stick to the rivers and the lakes that you are used to” – is remarkably similar to Paul McCartney’s “Waterfalls” (*McCartney II*, MPL/EMI, 1980), which begins and ends with the phrase “Don’t go jumping waterfalls, please keep to the lake.”

¹⁵ Other AIDS music from this period included specific references to AIDS. For comparison, in his 1994 song, “The What,” from his multi-platinum debut album, *Ready to Die*, the rapper Notorious B.I.G. (Christopher Wallace) admits, “I used to get feels on

discussions of this work, many people advanced their own reading of those three letters, including S-E-X, H-I-V, A-I-D (an illogical shortened version of AIDS), G-U-N (because a boy is shot in the music video), G-O-D (because T-Boz points three fingers to the sky in the video), and L-S-D (because of another line from the song: “for tootin’ caine into your own vein”). Without being explicit, TLC named HIV/AIDS in much that same manner as Prince did in “Sign o’ the Times” (1987), when he referred to “a big disease with a little name,”¹⁶ and Salt-N-Pepa did in “Let’s Talk about Sex” (1990), when they referred to “a three-letter word I heard was a curse.”¹⁷

The “Waterfalls” music video, directed by F. Gary Gray (b. 1970), served to explicate the ambiguous lyrics by taking advantage of the public’s slowly emerging familiarity with AIDS. The video showed that before the couple had sex the woman took and discarded a condom from the man’s hand, indicating that the man appropriately offered the condom but that the couple did not use it. Gray depicted a hinged picture frame with the woman on one side and the man on the other, but the male face in the picture rapidly changed in a sequence that suggested the woman’s previous multiple sexual partners. Gray also incorporated a scene with the man looking at lesions on his face in a mirror – surely intended to be markers of AIDS. All of these factors signaled

the bitch / now I throw shields on the dick / to stop me from that HIV shit.” Notorious B.I.G., “The What,” *Ready To Die* (Bad Boy, 1994).

¹⁶ Prince, “Sign o’ the Times,” *Sign o’ the Times* (Warner Bros., 1987).

¹⁷ Salt-N-Pepa, “Let’s Talk About Sex,” *Blacks’ Magic* (Next Plateau, 1990).

how Gray and TLC considered the public's slowly increasing awareness of AIDS and how they used the video to expound upon their warning messages about unprotected sex – all without ever naming AIDS or HIV.

In some cases music critics did the naming for TLC, making the oblique explicit. Most published reviews of the song and video, in both local newspapers and national publications, called attention to the AIDS context. For instance, in 1994 the *Pittsburg Post-Gazette* identified the song's "tragic foreshadowing of an AIDS tragedy."¹⁸ The next year, 1995, *Billboard* magazine called it the "first No. 1 single to make a reference to HIV or AIDS"¹⁹; the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* noted that the song "warns about AIDS"²⁰; *Newsweek* called "Waterfalls" an "AIDS song"²¹; and the *Jerusalem Post*, describing the video, referred to the "young stud who catches AIDS."²² But like the journalists who reviewed Corigliano's Symphony no. 1, some reviewers chose not to mention HIV/AIDS. For example, in 1995 a short article in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

¹⁸ Tony Norman, "Try a Little TLC," *Pittsburg Post-Gazette*, 16 December 1994.

¹⁹ Fred Bronson, "Back for Good for the First Time," *Billboard*, 12 August 1995.

²⁰ Sonia Murray, "Welcome Noize: Local Producing Trio Behind Big TLC Hit Puts a Positive Spin on Its Brand of Rap That Revisits the Spirit of a '60s Soul Sound," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 14 November 1995.

²¹ Jean Seligmann and Nina A. Biddle, "The Opposite of Unplugged," *Newsweek*, 18 September 1995.

²² Tirzah Agassi, "They Are Women, Hear Them Roar," *Jerusalem Post*, 5 September 1995.

called it “one of the most compelling cautionary tales in recent memory”²³ and in 2000 *Rolling Stone* magazine reflected on the popularity of the song without mentioning AIDS, suggesting that “the song’s serious subject matter . . . made it resonate with so many fans.”²⁴

***Billboard* AIDS**

“Waterfalls” is central to my study in part because *Billboard* placed it at the top of their charts. *Billboard* remains the leading commercial music trade magazine in the United States – what the *New York Times* has called “the recording industry’s bible.”²⁵ *Billboard*’s long history began with its founding in 1894, and by 1901 newsstands in all major cities sold it. In 1958 *Billboard* began publishing its “Hot 100” chart by measuring two statistics: retail sales and airplay. *Billboard* does not share the exact methods by which it determines its rankings, but *Billboard* nonetheless has obtained the respect of the music industry and the public because it has positioned its “Hot 100” as an unbiased rating system. While other magazines, such as *Talking Machine World*, *Variety*, and

²³ “Pop on the Rocks,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 28 December 1995.

²⁴ “TLC: ‘Waterfalls,’” *Rolling Stone*, 7 December 2000.

²⁵ Marc Ferris, “On the Charts,” *New York Times*, 8 July 2001.

Metronome, publish similar charts, none of them have packaged their data as “statistically reliable.”²⁶

In 1991 *Billboard* changed its methods of data gathering and utilized new technologies from a company called SoundScan. This change in methodology allowed *Billboard* to more accurately measure sales without relying on record stores to report their own data. Despite some initial objections from executives at record labels and others who had grown accustomed to the older method, the music industry grew to respect the new *Billboard* method for determining a song’s commercial popularity.²⁷ *Billboard* may or may not be a “true” measure of popularity, but it is clearly a trusted voice concerning what is “hot.” Musicologist David Brackett comments on the value of the *Billboard* charts in his influential book, *Interpreting Popular Music*:

Even if we admit its [*Billboard*’s] radical contingency, employing a concept of “popularity” derived in this manner does have its uses: regardless of whether it constructs or reflects reality, “popularity” participates in the larger discursive formation of the entertainment industry at any given moment.²⁸

²⁶ N. Anand and Richard A. Peterson, “When Market Information Constitutes Fields: Sensemaking of Markets in the Commercial Music Industry,” *Organization Science* 11 (2000): 274.

²⁷ For more on the reaction to the new model, see, for example, Marcus Breen, “*Billboard* Goes into Technological Overdrive to Make Radio Hits,” *Popular Music* 9 (1990): 369-70; and Ferris, “On the Charts.” See also, Eric T. Bradlow and Peter S. Fader, “A Bayesian Lifetime Model for the ‘Hot 100’ *Billboard* Songs,” *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 96 (2001): 369.

²⁸ David Brackett, *Interpreting Popular Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 37.

Likewise, this analysis uses *Billboard* to suggest that for the better part of two months in 1995, the entertainment industry understood “Waterfalls” to be the ultimate representation of popularity.

Few musical responses to HIV/AIDS on the *Billboard* charts referred to AIDS explicitly. Some musicians have been understandably reluctant to actually name AIDS or HIV in the text of their music, and the following section will focus on four exceptions to this pattern: U2’s “One,” Elton John’s “The Last Song,” Liz Phair’s “Ride,” and Janet Jackson’s “Together Again.” Focusing almost exclusively on *how* popular musical works become associated with AIDS, the following examination of these four songs on the *Billboard* charts in the 1990s will reveal how these musicians used a wide variety of techniques to align their music with AIDS, and ultimately it will help to further illustrate the significance of “Waterfalls.”

The world famous Irish rock band U2 produced one of the first songs on the *Billboard* charts with an AIDS context. Bono, the group’s lead singer, embraces music-politics and often lends his star power to help people with AIDS in particular. In 1990 his band contributed a song to a Red Hot Organization AIDS benefit album.²⁹ In 2002 Bono convinced Senator Jesse Helms of the need to fund AIDS prevention programs.³⁰ Bono

²⁹ U2 contributed a version of Cole Porter’s “Night and Day” to the Red Hot Organization’s *Red Hot and Blue: A Tribute to Cole Porter* (Capitol, 1990). For a more detailed discussion of the Red Hot Organization, see Chapter 4.

³⁰ Adam Clymer, “Helms Reverses Opposition to Help on AIDS,” *New York Times*, 26 March 2002. Helms publicly announced his decision in Helms, “We Cannot

also tried, unsuccessfully, to convince George W. Bush to fulfill his promise to fund AIDS programs in Africa.³¹ Because of Bono's efforts to raise awareness of AIDS, Bill Clinton, in 2003, called him a leader "we should follow in the new millennium."³²

A few years before TLC caught the public's attention with "Waterfalls," U2 released "One" (1991) on their album *Achtung Baby*.³³ The song debuted at no. 1 on the *Billboard* chart and became one of the most popular songs of all time.³⁴ The album did very well, too, as MTV, VH1, *Q Magazine*, *Spin*, *Rolling Stone*, and countless other online polls and articles have each included *Achtung Baby* with the greatest albums of all time.³⁵

"One" has all of the characteristics of a ballad: a slow tempo, sentimental lyrics, and a stanzaic form that alternates between A and B sections. Because of the repetitive

Turn Away," *Washington Post*, 24 March 2002. For Bono's recollection of his meetings with Helms, see Michka Assayas, *Bono* (New York: Riverhead, 2005), 179-80.

³¹ See, for example, Mike Allen, "Bono Recounts 'Row' with President over AIDS Funds: Africa Needs More Money Sooner, Singer Says," *Washington Post*, 17 September 2003; and "Bono, Bush Clash over AIDS Funds," *Houston Chronicle*, 17 September 2003. For more on Bono's activism, see Greg Behrman, *The Invisible People: How the U.S. Has Slept through the Global AIDS Pandemic, the Greatest Humanitarian Catastrophe of Our Time* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 270-7.

³² "Clinton Praises Bono's Giving Spirit," *Houston Chronicle*, 24 February 2003.

³³ U2, "One," *Achtung Baby* (Island, 1991).

³⁴ In *Selections from MTV's Greatest Pop Songs* (Hal Leonard), for example, "One" is listed at no. 8.

³⁵ For example, *Achtung Baby* occupies the 62nd spot in Pat Blashill et al, "The 500 Greatest Albums of All Time," *Rolling Stone*, 11 December 2003.

musical structure, the minor-key melody and Bono's poignant words stand out in the musical texture. Like "Waterfalls," the text of "One" contains no specific references to HIV or AIDS:

- A1 Is it getting better?
 Or do you feel the same?
 Will it make it easier on you now?
 You got someone to blame
 You say
- B1 One love
 One life
 When it's one need
 In the night
 One love
 We get to share it
 Leaves you baby
 If you don't care for it
- A2 Did I disappoint you?
 Or leave a bad taste in your mouth?
 You act like you never had love
 And you want me to go without
 Well it's
- B2 Too late
 Tonight
 To drag the past out into the light
 We're one, but we're not the same
 We get to
 Carry each other
 Carry each other
 One
- A3 Have you come here for forgiveness?
 Have you come to raise the dead?
 Have you come here to play Jesus?
 To the lepers in your head
- B2 Did I ask too much?
 More than a lot
 You gave me nothing

Now it's all I got
 We're one
 But we're not the same
 Well we hurt each other
 And we're doin' it again

Coda You say
 Love is a temple
 Love a higher law
 Love is a temple
 Love the higher law
 You ask me to enter
 But then you make me crawl
 And I can't be holding on
 To what you got
 When all you got is hurt
 One love
 One blood
 One life
 You got to do what you should
 One life
 With each other
 Sisters
 Brothers
 One life
 But we're not the same
 We get to
 Carry each other
 Carry each other
 One

The first verse is fairly subdued, but the following verses become louder and more intense. Although Bono does not mention AIDS or HIV in this song, there are ample indications of its AIDS context: the liner notes plainly state, "All royalties from this

single went to AIDS Research” and in 1992 a *Billboard* headline announced, “U2 to Donate ‘One’ Money to AIDS Groups.”³⁶

Given this song’s extra-musical connections to AIDS, a few writers have concluded that it is a conversation between a father and a son that takes place shortly after the son reveals that he is gay and has contracted HIV.³⁷ Understood this way, the lyrics are both heartbreaking and hopeful. But because the lyrics are so vague it is unlikely that anyone hearing “One” would understand the AIDS context without additional information. Furthermore, U2 does not provide any obvious cues in “One” like TLC did in “Waterfalls” with their “three letters” reference. Consequently, the extra-musical cues are necessary to identify “One” as an AIDS song.

When asked about the readings of this song as an AIDS narrative, Bono said, “It was part of one of the layers of the story. . . . If a song deals with any kind of sexual or erotic subject matter, then the spectre of AIDS has to be present.”³⁸ At concerts over the years Bono has dedicated this song not just to people with AIDS but also to other groups including gay men and lesbians and the people of Sarajevo. During one performance of

³⁶ Craig Rosen, “U2 to Donate ‘One’ Money to AIDS Groups,” *Billboard*, 7 March 1992.

³⁷ See, for example, Theresa A. Martinez, “Where Popular Culture Meets Deviant Behavior: Classroom Experiences with Music,” *Teaching Sociology* 23 (1995): 415; and Niall Stokes, *U2: Into the Heart – the Stories Behind Every U2 Song* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2001), 99.

³⁸ Quoted in Stokes, *Into the Heart*, 99.

the song, “Bono spoke for several minutes about the Sept. 11 disaster and creative ways to respond.”³⁹ In both the lyrics of this song as well as in concerts, Bono has intentionally blurred the meaning of “One.” Similar to Corigliano’s Symphony no. 1, which moved audiences with or without Corigliano’s program note, “One” impacted audiences whether or not they associated the song with AIDS.

While Bono has frequently lent his talent and public persona to organizations and events that work to end AIDS, no musician has been, and continues to be, more committed to raising AIDS awareness and helping people with AIDS than Elton John – “rock music’s most public spokesman on AIDS.”⁴⁰ Sir Elton, as he is known since his knighting in 1998, does not want to be perceived as an AIDS spokesperson, but his record speaks for itself.⁴¹ The founder and chair of the Elton John AIDS Foundation, he has donated the sales from numerous singles – including his chart topping work with Dionne Warwick, Gladys Knight, and Stevie Wonder, “That’s What Friends Are For”

³⁹ Hank Bordowitz, ed., *The U2 Reader: A Quarter Century of Commentary, Criticism, and Reviews* (Milwaukee, Wisc.: Hal Leonard, 2003), 176.

⁴⁰ Claude Bernardin and Tom Stanton, *Rocket Man: The Encyclopedia of Elton John* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995), 2.

⁴¹ For more on musicians not wanting to be AIDS spokespeople, see Steve Hochman and Mary Herczog, “AIDS and Rock: Sound of Silence,” *Rolling Stone*, 30 April 1992.

(1985) – to AIDS charities.⁴² When Ryan White, the Indiana teenager with hemophilia, died of complications due to AIDS in 1991, Elton John stood by his side.⁴³ After Freddie Mercury died of AIDS on November 24, 1992, John played at the “Freddie Mercury Tribute: Concert for AIDS Awareness” – an AIDS benefit concert that television stations carried “in virtually every country in the world.”⁴⁴ Additionally, newspapers and magazines commonly print the words “Elton John” and “AIDS” in the same headline.⁴⁵

In 1992 John released “The Last Song,” and he left many clues about the song’s AIDS context. John made it his first American single to benefit his foundation. Roger Spottiswoode used it at the conclusion of his 1993 HBO movie, *And the Band Played On*,

⁴² See “Elton John Dedicates Single Profits to AIDS,” *Toronto Star*, 8 October 1992; and Melinda Newman, “Elton John Assisting AIDS Research: Donating Future Singles Sales Royalties,” *Billboard*, 17 October 1992.

⁴³ There were many articles concerning White’s death in newspapers around the country. For a succinct description of White’s life and the events leading up to his death, see, for example, Dirk Johnson, “Ryan White Dies at 18,” *New York Times*, 9 April 1990; or Larry Tye, “Ryan White Dies from Complications of AIDS,” *Boston Globe*, 9 April 1990.

⁴⁴ Peter Watrous, “Pop World Hears the AIDS Message,” *New York Times*, 20 April 1992.

⁴⁵ Here are just a few examples: “Elton John Dedicates Single Profits to AIDS”; “Elton John Rags Bring Riches for AIDS Charity,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, 5 June 1996; Elysa Gardner, “Elton John Leads Fight against AIDS,” *Rolling Stone*, 26 November 1992; James Meikle, “Elton John Attacks ‘Shameful’ Spending Levels on AIDS/HIV,” *Guardian* (London), 21 May 2002; Newman, “Elton John Assisting AIDS Research”; Judy Siegel, “Elton John Joins Campaign for AIDS Awareness in Israel,” *Jerusalem Post*, 9 June 1993; and Sheryl Gay Stolberg, “Elton John Plays the Capitol for AIDS Money,” *New York Times*, 12 April 2002.

based on Randy Shilts's book of the same title.⁴⁶ Although it never made it as far up on the *Billboard* charts as "Waterfalls" or "One," "The Last Song" made it to the sixth position and spent nine weeks on the *Billboard* "Top 40." In 1993 Elton John won the ASCAP award for "The Last Song," in addition to "songwriter of the year."⁴⁷

The weightlessness of the musical texture and the almost painfully slow rhythm of "The Last Song" nearly equal the general sense of loss and anguish in the lyrics. For most of this ballad, the piano, strings, and other instruments disappear into the background of the texture and John's voice speaks directly to the listener, much like a conversation. Like "Waterfalls" and "One," "The Last Song" contains no specific textual references to HIV or AIDS:

Verse 1	Yesterday you came to lift me up As light as straw and brittle as a bird Today I weigh less than a shadow on the wall Just one more whisper of a voice unheard
Verse 2	Tomorrow leave the windows open As fear grows please hold me in your arms Won't you help me if you can to shake this anger I need your gentle hands to keep me calm
Chorus	`Cause I never thought I'd lose

⁴⁶ The book *And the Band Played On* by Randy Shilts is one of the most often cited histories concerning the first part of the AIDS crisis. Shilts died from AIDS on 17 February 1994. For more on his death, see Jerry Adler and Carey Monserrate, "And the Band Stopped Playing," *Newsweek*, 28 February 1994; and Erica Goode, "The Day the Music Died," *U.S. News & World Report*, 28 February 1994.

⁴⁷ Craig Rosen, "Songwriting Teams Are among ASCAP's Top of the Pops," *Billboard*, 21 May 1994.

I only thought I'd win
 I never dreamed I'd feel
 This fire beneath my skin
 I can't believe you love me
 I never thought you'd come
 I guess I misjudged love
 Between a father and his son

Verse 3 Things we never said come together
 The hidden truth no longer haunting me
 Tonight we touched on the things that were never spoken
 That kind of understanding sets me free

Chorus

Much as it is with “Waterfalls” and “One,” “The Last Song” uses opaque lyrics to suggest an AIDS context while allowing for other readings. However, there are references to AIDS in nearly every verse, including phrases like “I weigh less than a shadow on the wall” and “this fire beneath my skin.” With the line “I guess I misjudged love between a father and his son,” “The Last Song” becomes similar to U2’s “One,” with its seeming rapprochement narrative between a gay man dying of AIDS and his estranged father.⁴⁸

Like the other artists already discussed, Elton John revealed the AIDS component of his song mostly through non-musical cues: he released it in 1992, the same year he

⁴⁸ The following writers discuss this aspect of “The Last Song”: Bernardin and Stanton, *Rocket Man*, 2, 94, 145; Gary David Comstock, “Fathering/Ferrying Gay Children: Salvific Moments and Process,” *Journal of Men’s Studies* 2 (1993): 129-38; and Elizabeth J. Rosenthal, *His Song: The Musical Journey of Elton John* (New York: Billboard Books, 2001), 340.

established the Elton John AIDS Foundation; and he dedicated the album to Vance Buck, a friend of his who had died of AIDS.⁴⁹ The year of the album's release *Rolling Stone* announced that the proceeds from both the single and the video of "The Last Song" went to benefit AIDS charities.⁵⁰ In 1995 Bernie Taupin, the lyricist, reflected back on "The Last Song," suggesting that AIDS "was a big subject that's never been covered in a song before and I thought somebody should deal with it."⁵¹ Although "The Last Song" contained no explicit references to AIDS in the text, it acquired an AIDS context.

"One" (1991) and "The Last Song" (1992) both appeared before "Waterfalls" (1994), but the lack of direct textual references to AIDS /HIV in popular music on the *Billboard* charts continued after 1994. Liz Phair included "Ride" (1998) on her album *Whitechocolatespaceegg*, which debuted at number thirty-five on the *Billboard* charts and never went any higher. In contrast to John's sentimental pop ballad and U2's contemplative "One," Phair's "Ride" has a much faster tempo and is more aggressive

⁴⁹ Bernardin and Stanton, *Rocket Man*, 14.

⁵⁰ The six charities were the AIDS Project Los Angeles, Hollywood Supports, Gay Men's Health Crisis, Project Open Hand in Atlanta, the Ryan White Fund/Ryan White Infectious Disease Center, and the Pediatric AIDS Foundation. See Gardner, "Elton John Leads Fight against AIDS."

⁵¹ Quoted in Rosenthal, *His Song*, 340. I disagree with his assertion that AIDS has "never been covered in a song before." See, for example, Ani DiFranco, "On Every Corner," *Not So Soft* (Righteous Babe, 1991); Diamanda Galás, *Masque of the Red Death Trilogy* (Mute, 1989); Prince, "Sign o' the Times"; Public Enemy, "Meet the G That Killed Me," *Fear of a Black Planet* (Def Jam, 1990); Reed, "Halloween Parade"; U2, "One"; or Frank Zappa, *Thing-Fish* (Rykodisc, 1984).

semiotically. Her acoustic guitar accompaniment is repetitive and edgy, combining elements of pop and indie rock. When she sings “I need/get a ride from you,” Phair sounds like she is speaking directly to someone in sexual overtones.

The ending of the song (B4) contained a clear reference to HIV/AIDS to anyone who knew something of HIV infection:

- | | |
|---------|---|
| A1 | As I stumble into bed, I curse the devil in my head
And if I die before I wake, I hope the lord won't hesitate
To pluck my coffin from the ground
He need not heed the neighbors now
And throw me up for all to see,
The flies of August swarming me |
| B1 | I get a ride
Right by your side
Under your skin
I'm digging in |
| A2 | I don't know, but I've been told
The road to heaven is paved with gold
And if I die before I wake |
| B2 (x2) | I need a ride
I need a ride
I need a ride from you |
| A3 | Well sticks and stones can break my bones
And boys can make me kick and moan
But when I want it autodrive |
| B3 (x2) | I get a ride
I get a ride
I get a ride from you |
| A4 | Now I lay me down to sleep
I pray the lord my soul to keep
And if I die before I wake
I hope the lord won't hesitate
To pluck my coffin from the ground
He need not heed the neighbors now |

And throw me up for all to see
The flies of August swarming me

B4 (x2) I get a ride
98.5
Positive T-cell
Regeneration
Regeneration
Regeneration
Positive T-cell
Regeneration

T-cells are a type of lymphocyte and an important part of the immune system. T-cell count, also called a CD4 count, has great consequence to a person with HIV. But not everyone understood the reference to T-cells – for example, most of the critics who wrote about “Ride” did not seem to get the reference to AIDS or they simply decided not to mention the connection.⁵²

Knowing more about Liz Phair’s father, John Phair, makes this song especially noteworthy. John Phair, a world-class medical authority on HIV, published the first of many papers concerning AIDS in 1983 – two years before his daughter left home for

⁵² One of the few reviewers that mentions the AIDS reference is Mark Jenkins, “Liz Phair’s Flair for Novel Pop,” *Washington Post*, 26 August 1998. Each of these articles review *Whitechocolatespaceegg*, mention “Ride,” but do not mention HIV/AIDS: “Heart and Soul: Levert Album Has Depth, Staying Power,” *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, Ohio), 9 August 1998; Patrick Mac Donald, “On the Road Again: Liz Phair Overcomes a Colossal Case of Stage Fright and Returns to Touring after a Three-Year Break,” *Seattle Times*, 24 September 1998; Jane Stevenson, “All’s Phair with Liz on Her Latest,” *Toronto Sun*, 9 August 1998; and Anthony Violanti, “Phair to Middling: A Mellowed, but Still Introspective, Songwriter,” *Buffalo News* (New York), 14 August 1998.

college.⁵³ One can only imagine what young Liz learned about HIV/AIDS from her father growing up. Whatever the elder Phair's influence, this song illustrates yet another technique to get around using the letters HIV or AIDS: technical jargon.⁵⁴

My final example before returning to "Waterfalls" is Janet Jackson's "Together Again" (1997).⁵⁵ Like most of the other songs discussed above, "Together Again" became immensely popular, and in January 1998 it moved to the top spot on *Billboard's* "Hot 100."⁵⁶ While the overall topic is death, the text of "Together Again" contains no discernible references to HIV/AIDS:

⁵³ In this paper John Phair and his co-authors "report the first case of a homosexually active man with severe hemophilia A in whom acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) developed." S. B. Kalish et al, "Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome in a Patient with Multiple Risk Factors," *Archives of Internal Medicine* 143 (1983): 2310-1.

⁵⁴ The significance of the number 98.5 is unclear. It could be a reference to the 98.5% specificity of HIV EIA tests or to the 98.5% sensitivity of OraQuick testing, but neither of these conclusions makes much sense. From the context, it also does not appear to be a reference to 98.6 degree body temperature. Various Web sites concerning AIDS "myths" (including www.virusmyth.net) suggest that only 1.5% of the estimated people living with HIV ever develop AIDS and therefore 98.5% don't get AIDS. But it is not likely that the daughter of a famous AIDS researcher would believe such myths. Some of John Phair's literature does note 98.5 but, again, the connections are vague at best. I have posed this question to numerous people who work in the AIDS field, including doctors, AIDS activists, a friend who works at an AIDS clinic, and the director of Wisconsin's HIV/AIDS Program, James Vergeront – many of their suggestions are listed here. I cannot help but wonder how audiences have interpreted this reference.

⁵⁵ Janet Jackson, "Together Again," *The Velvet Rope* (Virgin, 1997).

⁵⁶ Fred Bronson, "'98 Could Break a No.1 Record," *Billboard*, 31 January 1998.

Intro	There are times when I look above and beyond There are times when I feel your love around me baby I'll never forget my baby I'll never forget you
Verse 1	There are times when I look above and beyond There are times when I feel your love around me baby I'll never forget my baby When I feel that I don't belong Draw my strength From the words when you said Hey it's about you baby Look deeper inside you baby Dream about us together again What I want us together again baby I know we'll be together again 'cause
Chorus	Everywhere I go Every smile I see I know you are there Smilin' back at me Dancin' in the moonlight I know you are free 'Cause I can see your star Shinin' down on me
Bridge	Good times we'll share again Makes me wanna dance Say it loud and proud All my love's for you
Verse 2	Always been a true angel to me Now above I can't wait for you to wrap your wings around me baby Wrap them around me baby Sometimes hear you whisperin' No more pain No worries will you ever see now baby I'm so happy for my baby Dream about us together again What I want us together again baby I know we'll be together again 'cause
Chorus	

Bridge

Verse 3 There are times when I look above and beyond
 There are times when I feel you smile upon me baby
 I'll never forget my baby
 What I'd give just to hold you close
 As on earth
 In heaven we will be together baby
 Together again my baby

Chorus [x2]

Despite this song's ambiguous text, it had a clear extra-musical AIDS context. Jackson donated the proceeds from this song to AmFAR, the American Foundation for AIDS Research, and numerous newspaper critics mentioned this song's connection to AIDS.⁵⁷

In one interview Jackson explained why she wrote "Together Again": "I wanted something that sounded like Donna Summer, that had the melody that makes you feel good inside and that had the character of my friends who passed away from AIDS."⁵⁸ In referring to Donna Summer, Jackson sent a signal to those in the know. Summer's

⁵⁷ See, for example, Larry Flick, "Janet Jackson: Together Again," *Billboard*, 8 November 1997; Larry Katz, "Janet Jackson Continues to Chart a Personal Course with 'the Velvet Rope,'" *Boston Herald*, 3 October 1997; J. R. Reynolds, "Janet Jackson Gets Topical on 'Rope,'" *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Col.), 2 September 1997; Michael Saunders, "Janet Jackson Turns Her Focus Inward," *Boston Globe*, 3 October 1997; Joy R. Sewing, "Jackson Matures with 'Velvet Rope,'" *Houston Chronicle*, 7 October 1997; Jane Stevenson, "Jackson Shows New Maturity on the Velvet Rope," *Toronto Sun*, 12 October 1997; and Barry Walter, "Rocking the Gay Bandwagon: New Mainstream CDs with Gay Themes," *Advocate*, 25 November 1997.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Jim Farber, "True 'Velvet': Janet Jackson Gets Personal About Her New LP, Her Sexuality and Her Famous Kin," *Daily News* (New York), 11 October 1998.

support of AIDS charities and her willingness to support AIDS benefit concerts made her especially popular in gay communities. Wayne Studer called her song “I Will Survive” (1978) “an anthem for the gay community” – both before and after AIDS – and Nadine Hubbs called the song a “gay-disco emblem.”⁵⁹ Akin to Donna Summer, Jackson uses “Together Again” to express her support of people with AIDS as well as the gay community, and Jackson evokes Summer’s music with her languorous voice over a repetitive synthesized accompaniment and a repetitious bass line that outlines the root progressions of each chord.⁶⁰ Jackson, like Summer, made two versions of her song – in addition to the version on *Velvet Rope*, Jackson released an album more suitable for dancing later the same year (November 1997) under the Pid label – it included a diverse group of remixes of “Together Again” at various tempos, in multiple musical styles, and with alternate vocals.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Wayne Studer, *Rock on the Wild Side: Gay Male Images in Popular Music of the Rock Era* (San Francisco: Leyland Publications, 1994), 269; and Nadine Hubbs, “‘I Will Survive’: Musical Mappings of Queer Social Space in a Disco Anthem,” *Popular Music* 26 (2007): 241.

⁶⁰ Musical similarities between these women should not come as a surprise as both of them have worked with dance music producer Giorgio Moroder. For more on Summer and Moroder’s collaboration, see, for example, Stephen Holden, “Disco: The Medium Is the Message,” *High Fidelity*, August 1979; and Holden, “Donna Summer’s Sexy Cinderella,” *Rolling Stone*, 12 January 1978.

⁶¹ The radio version of “Together Again” lasted just over five minutes. Summer made her “Love to Love You Baby” (1975) available in one version for radio play lasting less than five minutes and another version for dance clubs that continued for nearly seventeen minutes. Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman, *American Popular Music: From Minstrelsy to MTV* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 362.

Many reviews do not mention the connections between “Together Again” and AIDS, instead labeling the work as “socially informed,” “celebratory,” or “an elegy disguised as an arm-waving, feel-good song.”⁶² Descriptions such as these further masked the song’s connection to AIDS and again demonstrate the position of the reviewer in raising AIDS awareness. When reviewers mention the work’s connection to AIDS, they raise awareness of AIDS.

Jackson made one clear reference to AIDS in the liner notes when she placed a small red AIDS ribbon next to the words “Together Again.” Jackson used this widely recognized symbol, rather than words, to connect her song to AIDS. The red ribbon, a product of the New York-based Visual AIDS Artists Caucus, made its first publicized appearance at the Tony Awards in 1991. By late-1997, a few months before Jackson released “Together Again,” the *New York Times* stated: “Few other emblems in our society are as succinct and as recognizable as the AIDS ribbon.”⁶³ Jackson’s use of this ribbon in her liner notes further demonstrates the various lengths to which popular musicians go to provide an HIV/AIDS context in the absence of AIDS or HIV in their texts.

⁶² Richard Harrington, “Janet Jackson, Dynamo with a Velvet Touch,” *Washington Post*, 10 July 1998; Steve Jones, “Jackson’s Actions Wow Fans on Tour,” *USA Today*, 13 July 1998; and Jon Pareles, “At the Mercy of Lust, yet in Total Control,” *New York Times*, 11 July 1998.

⁶³ Aaron Betsky, “An Emblem of Crisis Made the World See the Body Anew,” *New York Times*, 30 November 1997.

That each of these musicians purposefully avoids “AIDS” and “HIV” is evidence of the stigma that continued to be associated with AIDS. These non-references to AIDS also highlight the importance of text to popular music. Each artist establishes an AIDS context through vague textual references, symbols, dedications, interviews, and other means. These musicians are not like the aggressive AIDS activists of ACT UP who take to the streets yelling, “Fight homophobia. Fight AIDS” or “Women don’t get AIDS, they just die from it.”⁶⁴ These musicians may well have been just as angry as the members of ACT UP, but like Corigliano, they tempered their anger and expressed their ideas within the constraints of American popular music. Either they chose self-censorship or other forces chose it for them. These outside forces even influenced Janet Jackson: in the process of making her album *Rhythm Nation 1814*, Jackson said that she “had been advised that her use of ‘socially conscious themes’ in her material would have a negative impact on ... sales.”⁶⁵ These popular musicians restricted themselves not unlike Corigliano equivocated his discussions of Symphony no. 1 – identifying his symphony as both an AIDS symphony and a symphony independent of its program. Like Corigliano, these musicians utilized other methods and codes to inform their audiences of the

⁶⁴ For more on the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), see Chapter 1.

⁶⁵ Gaar, *She’s a Rebel*, 325. Other people in the entertainment industry voiced similar concerns in the 1990s. When Jonathan Demme released *Philadelphia* in 1994, one of the executive producers said, “The perception was that it was risky and the studio was taking a gamble. The gamble would be how many people would go, knowing the subject matter had to do with AIDS and homosexuality?” Quoted in Linda Matchan, “Why People Go to See *Philadelphia*,” *Boston Globe*, 4 February 1994.

motivating force behind their music. Although it is difficult to measure the extent to which a popular song affected the cultural construction of AIDS, each of these four musical responses to HIV/AIDS on the *Billboard* charts raised awareness of AIDS – and the evidence indicates that none of them impacted audiences’ ideas about AIDS to the extent that “Waterfalls” did.

Waterfalls and AIDS

Journalists do not write about these other songs like they write about “Waterfalls.” For example, Janice Dunn wrote about the song in *Rolling Stone* magazine in 1998, almost four years after TLC released “Waterfalls,” and her discussion of the song’s creation, meaning, and subsequent influence is worth quoting at length:

Remember three summers ago, when TLC’s warning followed us to every barbecue, every trip to the beach? And indoors, the group’s video was constantly on the box. “Waterfalls,” a cautionary tale set to a languid, infectious groove, hit Number One on July 8th, 1995, and parked itself there for seven weeks. The song’s inception, according to Lisa “Left Eye” Lopes, is a “very, very interesting story.”

“I was serving time in an alcoholic and psychiatric rehabilitation center,” she begins. “Thirty days as part of a sentence [for] arson in the first degree. You know what I’m saying?” (For those who do not: In late 1994, Lopes pleaded guilty to torching the Atlanta mansion of her then boyfriend, Falcons receiver Andre Rison.)

“Anyway, I’m in this home, right?” Lopes continues, “I’d been there three weeks, and my record company calls and says that we’re recording a song called ‘Waterfalls.’” Lopes procured a six-hour pass to go to the Atlanta studio where band mates Tionne “T-Boz” Watkins and Rozonda “Chilli” Thomas awaited with the production team Organized Noize. En route to the studio, she says, “I look in the sky and I see this rainbow. And everything looked so beautiful, because I hadn’t been outside in three weeks.” She laughs. “I was staring at this rainbow, like, ‘Wowww.’” Lopes heard a rough cut of the song (written for TLC by Marqueze Etheridge), took the tape back to the center and wrote the rap the next

day. “And that’s how I started it,” she says. “‘I seen the rainbow yesterday.’ The song was so touching to me, because of the situation that I was in, that I was basically pulling words straight out of my soul.”

The message of “Waterfalls,” says Lopes, is about “personal hardships: We speak of a little boy who’s selling drugs, who is careless with his life and ends up dead. Then we talk about an AIDS situation where a couple has been careless. That’s their waterfall. Anything that is going to hold you back in life is a waterfall.” The members of TLC still hear from fans who’ve been touched by the song, including teenagers who have played it at the funerals of friends they’ve lost.⁶⁶

Dunn touches on how far “Waterfalls” spread through popular culture – it followed her (Dunn) everywhere. This passage also identifies a key difference between “Waterfalls” and the songs by U2, Elton John, Liz Phair, and Janet Jackson – TLC used “Waterfalls” to sound a warning about the dangers of AIDS.

Like Elton John and Bono, the women of TLC were AIDS activists. TLC sported condoms on their clothes (Lisa “Left Eye” Lopez affixed condoms to her eyeglasses) at concerts to encourage women to protect themselves. The condoms visually reinforced the safe sex messages in their songs, and the audiences got the messages. A few people have begun to acknowledge and study the role of popular music, particularly hip-hop and rap, in HIV prevention efforts. In a 1998 study of the effectiveness of hip-hop music in HIV prevention efforts targeted at African American adolescents, its authors argued, “The overall implications of using hip-hop music in health promotion are unlimited.”⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Janice Dunn, “Waterfalls,” *Rolling Stone*, 9 July 1998.

⁶⁷ Torrance Stephens, Ronald L. Braithwaite, and Sandra E. Taylor, “Model for Using Hip-Hop Music for Small Group HIV/AIDS Prevention Counseling with African American Adolescents and Young Adults,” *Patient Education and Counseling* 35 (1998):

Another study of African American adolescent females concluded that exposure to rap music videos, especially gangsta rap videos, is associated with sexual risk behaviors and STD infection.⁶⁸ Studies like these are important because they attempt to quantify the effectiveness of hip-hop and rap music in HIV prevention – something that is not a goal of the present study.

We should not underestimate the importance of the fact that three black women were singing a song about a disease that the public usually associated with white gay men. There were almost no major female figures associated with AIDS in 1994, with the possible exception of author/theorist Susan Sontag, due to her book, *AIDS and Its Metaphors*. Women were a significant part of the effort to end AIDS at the local level, but as usual the media did not give women – especially black women – the same degree of attention that they gave to men. With “Waterfalls,” TLC broke through this barrier.

The women of TLC were black, female messengers who brought their AIDS and safe sex messages to other women. Cheryl Keyes contends, “Throughout the 1990s, TLC remained steadfast with the message to women of all sizes regarding mental and physical

127-37. See also Steven C. Martino et al, “Exposure to Degrading Versus Nondegrading Music Lyrics and Sexual Behavior among Youth,” *Pediatrics* 118 (2006): E430-E41.

⁶⁸ Gina M. Wingood et al, “A Prospective Study of Exposure to Rap Music Videos and African American Female Adolescents’ Health,” *American Journal of Public Health* 93 (2003): 437-9.

wellness and body esteem.”⁶⁹ TLC’s T-Boz said, “We like to wear a lot of baggy stuff for one, it’s comfortable, and two, many of our fans don’t have the so-called perfect figure; we don’t want them to feel like they can’t wear what we’re wearing.”⁷⁰ In their first album, *TLC Tip*, they spoke directly to women in songs such as “Ain’t 2 Proud 2 Beg” and “Baby-Baby-Baby” – in both of these songs TLC celebrated their sexuality and suggested that women should not be ashamed of their sexual desires. With their next album, *CrazySexyCool*, they, of course, continued to promote messages of sexual responsibility – recall, too, that the name of the album represented the three adjectives that summed up the three sides of the female personality. When “Waterfalls” reached the height of its popularity, in 1995, TLC’s Rozonda “Chilli” Thomas explained, “‘Waterfalls’ is the song that we needed on the album to let people know that even though we weren’t wearing condoms on our clothes anymore, safe sex is still a priority, period.”⁷¹ Their subsequent albums, *Fanmail* (1999) and *3D* (2002), reinforced previous safe sex messages with chart-topping songs like “No Scrubs” (1999) and “Unpretty” (1999),⁷² as well as “Girl Talk” (2002). Reviews of concerts, too, suggested that the members of TLC were performing for female fans. For example, one review from 1999

⁶⁹ Cheryl Lynette Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 196-7.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Keyes, *Rap Music*, 197.

⁷¹ Murray, “Welcome Noize.”

⁷² For more on these songs, see Ann Powers, “The New Conscience of Pop Music,” *New York Times*, 19 September 1999.

mentioned “the predominantly young female audience.”⁷³ In another example, TLC’s song “Unpretty” discussed a man who made his partner feel unattractive, and one reviewer described a performance of that song as follows:

It’s hard to imagine anything surpassed the thrill of “Unpretty.” Around 30 girls watching from the stage pit were invited up to sing this quietly potent song, and they found strength in numbers. It was a moment of pure girl power.⁷⁴

Visual Reinforcement

While TLC tailored their messages specifically to female audiences, their safe sex messages in the “Waterfalls” video invited a wider audience of both males and females.

According to the choreographer/scholar Susan Leigh Foster,

[In the video, the three women of TLC] invite the camera, and implicitly, the viewer toward them, gesturing the body’s sensuality and desire. Masterfully, they rebuff, refocus, and reorient the gaze so to control access to intimacy. Standing firm, they mock the objectification of the female body. Slipping deftly out from under the gaze’s scrutiny, they illuminate pathways of desire whose directionality and accessibility they have crafted. By choreographing such a complex relationship to the gaze, these women artists embody the tense dynamism of their identities as African-American and feminist, as members of an oppressed and marginalized social group, and as leaders in an international avant-garde popular aesthetic.⁷⁵

⁷³ Toni Ruberto, “TLC Is Sexy, Spunky,” *Buffalo News* (New York), 19 November 1999.

⁷⁴ Joan Anderman, “TLC Puts on Personable, Powerful Show,” *Boston Globe*, 21 January 2000.

⁷⁵ Susan Leigh Foster, “Choreographies of Gender,” *Signs* 24, no. 1 (1998): 16.

Their music video used scenic backdrops, unique camera angles, and fish-eye lenses to address the audience in pioneering fashion.⁷⁶ To be sure, Lopes, Wade, and Watkins used the video to promote their album and show off their tight abs, but they also used it to develop the narrative in the “Waterfalls” story. F. Gary Gray, the video’s director, interspersed images of TLC standing in the water with the couple in the narrative. It showed that the woman discarded the condom and not the man. The video suggested that the man acquired HIV from the woman, but it only showed the effects of AIDS on the man.

It would be an oversimplification to call the woman in the video a *femme fatale*. We cannot tell from the video or the song if the woman knows her serostatus. “She gave the man loving his body couldn’t handle,” but that does not necessarily mean that she knew about her HIV-positive serostatus. The woman represented anyone, male or female, who practiced unsafe sex. The video reminded its audience that men and women could be HIV positive. Everyone knew men could get AIDS, but not everyone knew women could get AIDS as well. The woman in the video discarded the condom, highlighting its importance as a means to prevent the spread of AIDS. Far from blaming the woman, TLC promoted the same safe sex messages as those from *TLC Tip* and emphasized every woman’s responsibility to practice safe sex. The “Waterfalls” video reminded sexually fly women that condoms stop the spread of AIDS, illustrating what might happen if a

⁷⁶ Keyes, *Rap Music*, 214.

couple is not sexually responsible. The woman in the video made a poor choice in the negotiation over safe sex – she did not represent a *femme fatale*. Cheryl Keyes correctly concludes, “TLC’s espousal of being fly and sexually independent undoubtedly comes hand in hand with sexual responsibility via their lyrics and image.”⁷⁷ The video illustrated what happened when one woman did not make safe sex a priority.

More so than the lyrics of the song, the images in the video raise crucial questions concerning AIDS and race. Both the man and the woman in the video are white, although this does not necessarily mean that “Waterfalls” characterizes AIDS as a white disease. Metaphorically this work is HIV-positive – the lyrics are “infected” with those three letters. It is also positive in the sense that it acts like an intervention. By 1993 HIV infection had become the most common cause of death for black women (today it remains the leading cause of death for black women aged 25-34).⁷⁸ The video shows three black women saying that safe sex is important and that AIDS is their problem. They were not saying that AIDS is *only* their problem – they were promoting safer sexual practices for men and women. The woman in the video is white because AIDS affects black and white, not to mention Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, and so on. This video has the potential to do valuable cultural work for all races.

⁷⁷ Keyes, “Empowering Self,” 261.

⁷⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Update: Mortality Attributable to HIV Infection among Persons Aged 25-44 Years – United States, 1994,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 45, no. 6 (1996): 121-5; and CDC, “CDC HIV/AIDS Fact Sheet: HIV/AIDS among Women,” June 2007.

Descending Tetrachords

Part of the allure of “Waterfalls” is due to the fact that the musical structure reflects the messages in the lyrics and the video. Harmonically “Waterfalls” consists of four chords that repeat throughout the song: E-flat > B-flat > D-flat major 7 > A-flat. Figure 15 shows only the first part of the chorus, but the same harmonic sequence is present throughout the song:

Figure 15. TLC, “Waterfalls” Chorus (excerpt)

The figure displays two staves of musical notation for the chorus of TLC's "Waterfalls". The key signature is E-flat major (three flats). The first staff contains the melody for the first line of the chorus, with lyrics: "Don't go chas-ing wa-ter-falls. Please stick to the riv-ers and the lakes that you're used". Above the staff, four chords are indicated: Eb Major, Bb Major, Db Major 7, and Ab Major. The second staff contains the melody for the second line of the chorus, with lyrics: "— to. I know that you're gon-na have it you're way or not at all but I think you're". Above this staff, two chords are indicated: Eb Major and Bb Major. The melody consists of a descending chromatic tetrachord (E-flat, D, D-flat, C) repeated throughout the chorus.

This highly repetitive construction is consistent with the message of the text, which encourages listeners to stick to the safety of their daily routines (symbolized by rivers and lakes) and avoid doing anything too crazy (like chase waterfalls). The catchy groove becomes quickly familiar through repetition.

The melody emphasizes the notes E-flat > D > D-flat > C, a descending chromatic tetrachord. TLC's voices – more than bass line – emphasize the descending tetrachord. As many popular music scholars, including David Brackett and Simon Frith, suggest, it is

the words and sounds from the voice that speak most powerfully to listeners.⁷⁹ The E-flat > D > D-flat > C progression could simply represent falling water, but perhaps there is a greater significance to this melodic trope.

Numerous musicologists have commented on the impact and symbolism of the descending tetrachord as a kind of word painting that signals sadness. In Ellen Rosand's influential 1979 essay, "The Descending Tetrachord: An Emblem of Lament," she focuses on the tetrachord ostinato in Monteverdi's well-known *Lamento della ninfa* ("Lament of the Nymph," 1638), published in his eighth book of madrigals and shown here in figure 16:

Figure 16. Monteverdi, *Lamento della ninfa* (excerpt), mm. 40-43.



⁷⁹ See, for example, Brackett, *Interpreting Popular Music*, 2; and Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 183-202.

According to Rosand, “the most significant, potentially affective, feature of the pattern is its strong harmonic direction, reinforced by stepwise melody, steady, unarticulated rhythm, and brevity.”⁸⁰ Furthermore, she notes, “in its unremitting descent, its gravity, the pattern offers an analogue of obsession, perceptive as an expression of hopeless suffering.”⁸¹ Rosand’s comments concern the sound of the descending tetrachord generally, and not just the descending tetrachord in “Lament of the Nymph.” Likewise, in *Feminine Endings* Susan McClary comments on the “obsessive” quality of the descending tetrachord, “created musically through an unvarying cycle of four bass notes that seem to progress rationally through the A-minor tetrachord, only to double back inevitably to starting position.”⁸² For Rosand, McClary, and many others, the presence of the tetrachord signifies torment, sadness, and obsession.

In both Monteverdi’s progression and the “Waterfalls” progression the final harmony leads back to the beginning harmony. In the Monteverdi example, the notes in the bass are A > G > F > E, and those chords are realized as A-minor > G-major > F-major > E-major (see figure 16). Harmonically this progression moves from the tonic to the dominant and back. The E naturally leads to the A. In “Waterfalls,” the chords are E-flat > B-flat > D-flat major 7 > A-flat, with the harmony beginning with the tonic (E-flat)

⁸⁰ Ellen Rosand, “The Descending Tetrachord: An Emblem of Lament,” *Musical Quarterly* 65 (1979): 349.

⁸¹ Rosand, “Descending Tetrachord,” 350.

⁸² McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 87.

and ending on the sub-dominant (A-flat) (see figure 15). The repetition is not confined to the harmony; it is reinforced by the melody. The vocal line that begins on the final sub-mediator harmony (the A-flat chord) moves from the tonic of the chord (A-flat) up to the fifth of that chord (E-flat), which is also the tonic of the first chord and the beginning the next phrase.

This analysis is not to suggest that the musicians, writers, producers, and performers involved with the creation of “Waterfalls” intentionally modeled their song on Monteverdi’s work or that they purposefully tried to capitalize on the natural power of the descending tetrachord. Nonetheless, it seems appropriate that a song about HIV/AIDS would employ such an emblematic melodic structural trope that adds another layer of meaning. It seems most likely that Marqeeze Etheridge, the composer of “Waterfalls,” heard the descending tetrachord simply as a symbol of the “downward motion” in a person’s life that could potentially result from unsafe sex.

The musical structure of “Waterfalls” had more in common with Monteverdi’s lament than with other popular music. This melodic trope is common in popular music, such as in Ray Charles’s “Hit the Road Jack” (1961), Led Zeppelin’s “Babe I’m Gonna Leave You” (1968), The Bee Gees’s “I Started a Joke” (1968), Sting’s “Shape of My Heart” (1993), Backstreet Boys’ “Everybody” (1996), Jack Johnson’s “Sexy Plexi” (2001), and Lenny Kravitz’s “If I Could Fall In Love” (2001).⁸³ The difference with

⁸³ Thanks to Mark Katz for pointing out these, and many other descending tetrachords, to me.

“Waterfalls” is the frequency with which the motive is presented – its obsessive nature. To recall McClary, the fact that the descending tetrachord is stated in every phrase of this song gives it a particular power. As with “Lament of the Nymph,” it is easy to hear “Waterfalls” as a nearly endless descending progression.

The connections between “Waterfalls” and “Lament of the Nymph” are not limited to musical structure. In her essay Rosand calls “Lament of the Nymph” one of two important works that were significant to the development of the lament (the other being Monteverdi’s 1608 *Lamento d’Arianna*). Susanne Cusick has pointed out that Rosand’s essay “began an implicit scholarly tradition that has tended to perceive operatic laments as a gendered genre, overwhelmingly uttered in the voices of women.”⁸⁴ Like those operatic laments, “Waterfalls” is uttered in the voices of women. All of these works are related not just to the same musical motive, but also to women.

Indeed, the gender and race of the storytellers is of utmost importance. In Monteverdi’s work, three men sing of a nymph who has lost her lover. They begin the story, end the story, and provide commentary during the story, but the main portion of the work is the lament by the nymph herself. Once again McClary’s insight is helpful. She characterizes the nymph as a public exhibit, an object of the male gaze. In her view, the nymph is terrifying. The nymph is, quite simply, a madwoman. McClary understands “Lament of the Nymph” as a precursor to later operatic scenes that depict female

⁸⁴ Suzanne G. Cusick, “Re-Voicing Arianna (and Laments): Two Women Respond,” *Early Music* 27 (1999): 437.

madness. We, the audience, are permitted voyeuristic access and we feel safe from the threat of madness because men tell the story and their presence works “to the deliberate detriment of verisimilitude.”⁸⁵ Like Corigliano’s representation of madness in the “Tarantella” movement of Symphony no. 1, there is a sense that the contagion is contained.

In “Waterfalls,” it is TLC that occupies the narrative position of power, thus threatening male privilege and authority. As Tricia Rose put it, the women of TLC “resist and revise current patriarchal norms.”⁸⁶ The most frequent image in the “Waterfalls” video is of the three women of TLC standing in the water, like nymphs. In “Waterfalls” TLC inhabits the water, but they have become the storytellers. Their subject is no longer just the subject of the male gaze. In this modern lament, women (TLC) gaze upon the power of the woman in the video who is capable of spreading HIV. In Monteverdi’s work and in “Waterfalls” it is outsiders who tell the woman’s story, but in “Waterfalls” the storytellers are women. In their narrative, women represent both disease and prevention. The woman in “Waterfalls” becomes terrifying because we are permitted voyeuristic access to her act of discarding the condom. McClary’s description of the Monteverdi’s nymph is especially applicable to the woman in the “Waterfalls” story: “We the spectators are curious to know about her (in order to accumulate possible human

⁸⁵ McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 89.

⁸⁶ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 170-1.

experiences, in order to control), but we do not want to be endangered by a creature who is beyond reason and who can inflict unmotivated injury or spread her disease.”⁸⁷ The woman in TLC’s video may or may not be understood as mad, but we know for certain that she is diseased.

Conclusion

1994 represented a crucial year in the cultural construction of AIDS. In 1989-90 the perception of AIDS shifted from that of plague to that of chronic disease, and by 1994 AIDS gradually became more visible in popular culture. “Waterfalls” appeared just one year after the unexpected hit movie *Philadelphia* and the year after the Clinton inauguration. That year saw the appearance of a wide variety of AIDS-related music, including Laurie Anderson’s “Tightrope,” Reba McEntire’s “She Thinks His Name Was John,” Ween’s “The HIV Song,” Public Enemy’s “Race Against Time,” the Red Hot Organization’s album *Stolen Moments: Red Hot & Cool*, and the album *Heartbeats*. 1994 saw the premiere of Bill T. Jones’s AIDS dance *Still/Here* and John Greyson’s widely discussed AIDS movie musical *Zero Patience*. By 1994 the AIDS quilt had more than 20,000 panels. In that year scholars, though not musicologists, published countless books and articles concerning AIDS, notably Thomas Avena’s *Writers, Artists and AIDS*, Rob Baker’s *The Art of AIDS*, Ted Gott’s *Art in the Age of AIDS*, Therese Jones’s *Second*

⁸⁷ McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 89.

Generation AIDS Plays and Performances, and Robert Sullivan's *Rolling Stone* article, "In Search of a Cure of AIDS."⁸⁸

"Waterfalls" entered public consciousness in the midst of this explosion of cultural responses to AIDS. "Waterfalls," more than any other musical work, drew attention to AIDS and repositioned black female sexuality as a powerful force in shaping the cultural construction of AIDS. If "Waterfalls" had sounded or looked too much like a lecture or public service announcement, people might not have danced to it and listened to it in their cars in the same way. "Waterfalls" portrayed AIDS as something that affected both men and women, black and white. The audience for "Waterfalls" included black women, one of the fastest-growing risk groups for HIV infection. Because of the text's ambiguity, someone listening to the song did not have to hear it as an AIDS song. While the song did not explicitly mention HIV/AIDS, the video provided another layer of meaning and unmistakably promoted safe sex. Perhaps most significantly, "Waterfalls" disrupted the myth that AIDS affects only white gay men – one of the most powerful and deadly misconceptions of our time. The following chapters will explore more music that

⁸⁸ Thomas Avena, "Interview: Diamanda Galás," in *Life Sentences: Writers, Artists, and AIDS* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1994); Rob Baker, *The Art of AIDS* (New York: Continuum, 1994); Ted Gott, *Don't Leave Me This Way: Art in the Age of AIDS* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1994); Therese Jones, *Sharing the Delirium: Second Generation AIDS Plays and Performances* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1994); and Robert Sullivan, "In Search of the Cure for AIDS," *Rolling Stone*, 7 April 1994.

disrupted AIDS myths, but unlike “Waterfalls” many of my final examples will include explicit references to AIDS and HIV.

Chapter 4
Acoustic Contagion (or Acoustic Prevention)? *America Is Dying Slowly*, Gangsta Rap, and AIDS

In 1996 an AIDS charity, the Red Hot Organization, produced an AIDS benefit album entitled *America Is Dying Slowly (A.I.D.S.)*. Grace Harry, a black AIDS activist who created and developed the album, recruited several nationally recognized hip-hop musicians for the project, including Coolio (Artis Leon Ivey, Jr.), the Wu-Tang Clan, Eightball (Premro Smith) and MJG (Marlon Jermaine Goodwin), Pete Rock (Peter Phillips), Mobb Deep, and the Lost Boyz. While these musicians used the album as a worldwide forum to voice their ideas about AIDS, they also used the album to express their ideas about women. In “Check Ya Self,” Spice 1 (Robert L. Green, Jr.) described women as liars and sources of AIDS: “Scoop up the scrilla [money] boy that cuchi [vagina] be a killa ... You don’t know that hoe, man, that bitch can’t be trusted ... Betta watch these bitches cause they’re fake and phony.” Similarly in “The Yearn,” Pete Rock voiced: “She looked so good you’d think you wouldn’t need protection.” And in “Listen To Me Now,” Eightball explained, “On the scene mean stuffed in them jeans is how she did them ... how one by one she lures them in.” Most of the songs on the album claim that particular kinds of women – usually “hoes” or “bitches” – are the source of AIDS.

Consistent with the conventions of then mainstream hip-hop, all of the male performers on this album find it much easier to place the blame for AIDS on anyone but themselves. Whereas other popular music avoided references to gay male promiscuity, these songs called attention to normative heterosexual male behavior. The musicians performing these works describe how women, who do not appear to be HIV-positive,

contaminate unsuspecting men with HIV. These songs bring up to date the longstanding trope of the *femme fatale*. The songs warn that women with AIDS are deadly (“these hoes will put the tags on your toes”), that they are liars (“that bitch can’t be trusted”), that they are stupid (“bitch get a job and get your ass in somebody’s university”), and that they are cheap (“your girl is a tacky hoe”). Presumably targeted at young urban African-American males, with the intent of promoting safe sex, the songs on the album follow gangsta rap’s established conventions of insult, aggression, and hyper-masculinity.¹

Fear – not degradation – of women made *America Is Dying Slowly* a unique rap album. Whereas previous AIDS rap equated AIDS with gay men, the music on *America Is Dying Slowly* represented AIDS as not feminized, but female and threatening within heterosexual culture. Grace Harry, the album’s creator, saw homophobia all around her community:

A lot of [the artists who contributed music to *America Is Dying Slowly*] were really turned off by [AIDS]. I get into a lot of trouble for saying this but we’re a very homophobic community. There’s this attitude we need to be strong women and men and it’s not cool to be gay, and there’s also the thinking that AIDS is a gay, white man’s disease.²

¹ There are numerous histories of gangsta rap, including Jeff Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: Picador, 2005); Cheryl Lynette Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Eithne Quinn, *Nuthin’ but a “G” Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1994); and David Toop, *Rap Attack 3* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1999).

² Quoted in Errol Nazareth, “New CD Aimed at AIDS Awareness,” *Toronto Sun*, 25 July 1996.

There are plenty of examples that support Harry's claim, such as 2 Live Crew's homophobic song "Do Wah Diddy" from nearly a decade before.³ Set to Manfred Mann's popular 1964 melody, "Do Wah Diddy Diddy," the 2 Live Crew version ends with the following verse:

I saw this fag tricking at the bus stop
 Singing doo wah diddy diddy dum diddy doo
 I said you sissy motherfucker you know you oughta stop
 Doo wah diddy diddy dum diddy doo
 Spreading AIDS, spreading AIDS
 Punk bitch, punk bitch
 Watching dick, watching dick
 You know a real nigga ain't about all that shit

In 2 Live Crew's story, it is a gay man – not a "real nigga" – who spreads AIDS. They advise that the man "oughta stop," but he does not threaten them. Likewise, Public Enemy released a song in 1990 that conveyed a similar tale. Their unabashedly homophobic rap song "Meet the G that Killed Me" described a drug-addicted, HIV-positive, gay man who spread HIV by means of sex and needle sharing⁴:

Man to man
 I don't know if they can
 From what I know
 The parts don't fit
 (Ahh shit)
 How he's sharin' a needle
 With a drug addict
 He don't believe he has it
 (Either)

³ 2 Live Crew, "Do Wah Diddy," *Move Somethin'* (Little Joe Records, 1987).

⁴ Public Enemy, "Meet the G That Killed Me."

But now he does, he doesn't know cause he
 Goes straight to a ho
 Tell you what who was next on the but
 Wild thinin' on a germ
 Runnin' wild
 Yo stop
 But the bag popped

In “Meet The G That Killed Me” the construction of the HIV-positive drug addict, the HIV-positive gay man, and the female prostitute converge. The lyrics are bald (AIDS is a “germ”), but the message is clear. Both of these songs are more commentary than a cautionary tale, and both represent AIDS as male.⁵

The AIDS in *America Is Dying Slowly*, on the other hand, has infected women and there it threatens heterosexual men. The songs on this album debunk urban legends about AIDS, make frequent direct references to HIV/AIDS, discuss modes of transmission, and recommend preventative measures. For example, in “(Stay Away from

⁵ To be clear, homophobic music about AIDS is not limited to black musicians. For example, in 1988, Guns-N-Roses released an obviously homophobic and racist song, “One in a Million,” which included the following verse:

Immigrants and faggots
 They make no sense to me
 They come to our country
 And think they'll do as they please
 Like start some mini Iran
 Or spread some fucking disease

Then, in 1989 – in what could only be described as an enormous oversight – the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) selection committee asked Guns-N-Roses to be the headliner for their AIDS benefit show at Radio City Music Hall. Not surprisingly, GMHC later rescinded their invitation when they found out about this song. See Melinda Newman, “Guns-N-Roses Cut from AIDS Benefit,” *Billboard*, 25 March 1989.

the) Nasty Hoes,” Fat Joe (Jose Antonio Cartagena) complains that a “bitch hit me off with HIV, purposely,” but later in the song instructs, “practice safe sex, never flex unprotected.” “The Yearn,” by the Lost Boyz, contains numerous references to safe sex:

I threw on me a Rough Rider
I slid inside her
...
She said no condom so he risked it

America Is Dying Slowly contains dozens of references to condoms and includes many songs that warn (or remind) that unsafe sex can lead to AIDS. Add to this the fact that the explicit language and musical forms of the songs are the customary expression of gangsta rap and these words, set over a thumping bass, are powerful vehicles for HIV prevention.

Again, as with Corigliano and TLC, the artists on *America Is Dying Slowly* integrate HIV prevention messages within the conventions of familiar musical practices. These songs are fascinating for their potential impact on HIV-prevention efforts. As compared to traditional forms of communication, like pamphlets or speeches, these songs carry powerful messages. In *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*, Jeff Chang contends, “For the hip-hop generation, popular culture became the new frontline of the struggle. . . . Pop music, rap radio, indie film, cultural journalism – these could all be staging areas for guerilla strikes.”⁶ Surely the safe sex messages in *America Is Dying Slowly* would not have reached millions of young men as poetry without their thumping bass. What is more, Grace Harry helped produce the album in part

⁶ Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 249-50.

because she found out her 15-year-old sister attended a public high school in New York that offered advice about HIV prevention only through the distribution of pamphlets.⁷

Explicit language is a defining feature of much rap music (think of the warning label controversies), and as one 19-year-old student from New York discussing the content of rap music suggested, “If you try to show a different picture, the kids won’t want to listen.”⁸ *America Is Dying Slowly* forces the question of whether or not young rap audiences – males especially, but not exclusively – would be more or less likely to listen to safe sex messages if the musicians did not also convey a particular image of sexually active manhood. The album is fascinating because of its potential to reduce the transmission of HIV. While many people have wondered about the potential harm of violent rap music, few people have considered its potential as a tool to remind at-risk youth about the dangers of unprotected sex. It is fair to say that “watered-down” lyrics would have sounded more like public service announcements than “authentic” rap music.⁹ In 1995, words such as “bitch,” “ho,” “skeezer,” and “nigga” were so common in

⁷ Nazareth, “New CD Aimed at AIDS Awareness.”

⁸ Erik Eckholm, “Fan Asks Hard Questions About Rap Music,” *New York Times*, 24 December 2006.

⁹ For comparison, a 2001 Wisconsin Division of Public Health media campaign used three different public service announcements, including one titled “Rap,” which urged everyone to “take the test” and that “safe sex is a must.” “Rap” told listeners to “protect yourself.” These works were obviously public service announcements. See <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/aids-hiv/> for more information.

rap music that rap audiences – far from being offended – had come to expect them.¹⁰ So it would seem that the Red Hot Organization had to allow this language in order to present messages with street credibility.

This study has already examined a symphony, a popular song, and music video, and this chapter moves to an album – an AIDS benefit album. The previous chapters argued that Corigliano's Symphony no. 1 (1990) and TLC's "Waterfalls" (1994) helped to raise awareness of AIDS and positively affect HIV prevention efforts and the larger cultural construction of AIDS. *America Is Dying Slowly* sounds offensive to audiences that are not regular consumers of rap music, but like the other works discussed in this study it operates within the conventions of rap music and interrupts the construction of AIDS as a white, gay, male disease. The songs on *America Is Dying Slowly* are intriguing because an AIDS charity, the Red Hot Organization, recognized the importance of an "authentic" message and produced an album in order to raise awareness of AIDS and money for other AIDS charities. The album featured a collection of performances that functioned as a vehicle for social change. These songs are both problematic and important because they move beyond ambiguous narratives to specific messages that open up dialogue about AIDS-related issues. The remainder of this chapter will discuss the organization that produced the album and a number of the influential cultural events

¹⁰ See, for example, Bakari Kitwana, *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2003), 85-7, 135-6, 203-4, et al.

of the time that shaped the creation of *America Is Dying Slowly*. Looking beyond the potentially problematic aspects of the album, this chapter considers how *America Is Dying Slowly* functions within the larger landscape of musical constructions of AIDS.

Red Hot Organization

The Red Hot Organization, the first organization to use music to raise awareness and understanding of AIDS, raised money for AIDS charities all around the world. John Carlin founded the Red Hot Organization in 1989, around the same time that Corigliano completed Symphony no. 1. Carlin, who holds a law degree from Columbia University and a Ph.D. in comparative literature from Yale, has been a teacher, music producer, art critic, Whitney Museum curator, and lawyer, and he remains active in the organization.¹¹

The mission statement of his organization reads:

The Red Hot Organization produces music, videos, and other media events using the talents of leading musicians, visual artists, producers, and directors to raise funds and awareness to fight AIDS through pop culture.

Their Web site states that the organization has raised more than seven million dollars for AIDS relief, with the money going to a wide array of AIDS organizations around the world. It draws on the convention of blending entertainment with the advancement of a social cause.

¹¹ For more on Carlin's early involvement with the organization, see Christopher John Farley, "Beautifully Blurred," *Time*, 22 August 1999.

Between 1989, when Carlin founded Red Hot, and 1996, with the release of *America Is Dying Slowly*, they had already released seven albums – and since *America Is Dying Slowly* they have released seven more albums. The Red Hot Organization casts a wide net, and their albums have reached a vast number of people with a variety of musical tastes. Each of their albums highlights a different genre of music by some of the most recognized purveyors of that genre.

The Red Hot Organization's first album, *Red Hot and Blue* (Chrysalis, 1990), featured interpretations of Cole Porter (d. 1964) songs by U2, Sinéad O'Connor, k.d. lang, and the Neville Brothers, to name a just a few of the musicians involved in the project. Of their first album, Carlin said, "It struck me that the Cole Porter songs were a wonderful way to make a contemporary record that would appeal to all sorts of people and deliver a message."¹² His format of having popular musicians do reinterpretations of musically sophisticated songs by a gay man seemed especially clever as reviewers focused less on Porter's sexuality and more on comparing the remakes to the originals.¹³ Furthermore, the lyrics of Porter's songs, most notably "I've Got You Under My Skin," took on new meaning in a world with AIDS. Carlin's goal of appealing to a wide variety of people worked, and the album sold more than a million copies, spent 24 weeks on the

¹² Quoted in David Bauder, "Cole Porter Recruited for AIDS Battle Songs," *Toronto Star*, 7 November 1990.

¹³ See, for example, Edna Gundersen, "Lively 'Red Hot' Will Get under Your Skin," *USA Today*, 26 October 1990. For more on Porter's innovative musical style, see Alec Wilder, *American Popular Song: The Great Innovators, 1900-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), esp. 223-52.

Billboard charts, and generated extensive press coverage.¹⁴ The album gained new life in 2006 with its re-release that contained both songs and music videos on DVD.

Their second album, *Red Hot and Dance* (Columbia, 1992), a cross-generational mix of new as well as remixed popular and dance music, included a new single by the gay singer George Michael called “Too Funky,” as well as remixes of music by Madonna, Seal, and others. Later the same year Red Hot released music videos of the songs on DVD. For the third album, *No Alternative* (Arista Records, 1993), the Red Hot Organization dropped the “Red Hot” prefix. The album, a compilation of previously unreleased “alternative” music featuring the likes of Nirvana, Soundgarden, and Soul Asylum, sold well.¹⁵

In 1994, the same year that TLC released “Waterfalls,” the Red Hot Organization released two contrasting albums. A quick look at these two albums suggests that Red Hot carefully considered the implications and potential impact of each individual album as they continued to expand their audiences. AIDS affects everyone, but as these two 1994 albums demonstrate, Red Hot’s commercialism – their desire to sell records – greatly affected both their marketing strategies and their musical choices.

¹⁴ See, for example, Bauder, “Cole Porter Recruited for AIDS Battle Songs”; Gundersen, “Lively ‘Red Hot’”; and Stephen Holden, “The Pop Life,” *New York Times*, 28 February 1990.

¹⁵ Michael Snyder, “Alternative Rockers Rally against AIDS,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 12 December 1993.

The first album from 1994, *Red Hot and Country* (Mercury), featured such superstars as Brooks & Dunn, Johnny Cash, Dolly Parton, and Billy Ray Cyrus. The Grammy-nominated album contained just one song that discussed AIDS directly: Mary Chapin Carpenter's touching "Willie Short" (written by John Jennings). Carlin suggested that the public perception of AIDS had shifted in 1994, but also that AIDS continued to signify stigma:

We've tried to do this in a less activist way – this is more of a soft-sell-type project. For example: as opposed to using a slogan like "Stop AIDS Now" or "Practice Safer Sex," we've used the slogan "Go Safely." If you look at the album packaging, there's a picture of a bus going down a road – there's a bus metaphor that runs through the CD booklet – and over it is the slogan, which we thought was an appropriate way of dealing with this issue in a community where certain people might find it offensive.¹⁶

The Red Hot Organization did not regularly produce albums with controversial lyrics. Carlin skillfully calculated how audiences would receive his albums (he has raised more than \$7 million) and his goals were in line with that of many AIDS activists – such as the members of ACT UP, who were the people screaming "Stop AIDS Now" that he mentioned (both Red Hot and ACT UP were based in New York). Carlin's comments suggested that he thought *Red Hot and Country* would raise awareness of and money for AIDS only if avoided explicit references to AIDS in the music. The ambiguity of "Go Safely" equaled the vagueness of "don't go chasing waterfalls." Carlin surely knew that country music audiences could get AIDS, but he believed that this audience would only

¹⁶ This quotation comes from Richard Harrington, "Red Hot's Country Fun Raiser," *Washington Post*, 14 September 1994.

purchase an AIDS benefit album featuring some of the most popular country musicians if the album avoided calling too much attention to AIDS. For this album, at least, Carlin acted a bit more concerned with raising money than raising awareness of AIDS.

GRP, a progressive jazz label, released the other Red Hot album from 1994. For *Stolen Moments: Red Hot and Cool*, the Red Hot Organization concocted an eclectic album that combined hip-hop, rap, and jazz. *Time* magazine called it “the best music of 1994.”¹⁷ The album featured innovative sound as well as lyrics that directly confronted the epidemic. With *Stolen Moments* the Red Hot Organization eschewed the “non-activist” methods that motivated *Red Hot and Country* to produce a more confrontational album. In interviews concerning *Red Hot and Cool*, Carlin painted a completely different picture that foregrounded issues of reception, HIV prevention, and race:

We originally wanted to do a rap record to reach the streets, because AIDS has affected so many black people. . . . Communities of color are hard to reach by traditional methods. As things developed musically, we felt that this is where rap is heading. We also felt that jazz musicians have something to teach. We see these different generations of artists banding together as a metaphor for bringing people together to fight this disease – fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, with a common point of contact.¹⁸

¹⁷ “The Best Music of 1994 – *Stolen Moments: Red Hot & Cool* by Various Artists,” *Time*, 26 December 1994. Incidentally, TLC’s album *CrazySexyCool* also made the list. For more information on *Stolen Moments*, see Paul Verna, Marilyn A. Gillen, and Peter Cronin, “Review of *Stolen Moments: Red Hot & Cool*,” *Billboard*, 19 November 1994.

¹⁸ Jeff Levenson, “GRP Bows ‘Cool’ Set for Red Hot,” *Billboard*, 17 September 1994.

Whereas *America Is Dying Slowly* would target black youth, *Red Hot and Cool*, like *Red Hot and Dance*, would “fight” AIDS (one of Sontag’s military metaphors) by appealing to multiple generations. Again, Carlin’s knowledge of HIV prevention came through in this statement (his reference to difficulties reaching specific communities) and in the songs on the album. Whereas previous Red Hot albums mostly reworked existing material with an ambiguous AIDS context, this album contained new music with direct AIDS content. In one song, “Positive,” Michael Franti of Spearhead spoke about going to an AIDS clinic to get tested for HIV and the thoughts that went through his head about previous sexual partners, safe sex, and how he would live if he tested positive. This direct approach differed greatly from Carlin’s album of Porter covers and his “soft-sell-type project,” *Red Hot and Country*.

Unlike other AIDS organizations, however, Red Hot sold their albums not just to raise money for AIDS organizations, but also to distribute musical objects that could intervene and teach. Carlin did not elevate one album over the other, but he made assumptions about his audiences and their tastes. He approached each one differently, acknowledging the importance of semantics and that he needed to carefully control the language he used to promote each album. The Red Hot Organization structured each album for a particular artistic aesthetic and audience, often independent of musical considerations. Carlin’s statements indicate that there is a complicated dialectical tension between the Red Hot Organization and the music on their albums. Making money for AIDS charities is of great importance and each album contains a unique narrative. Yet,

the Red Hot Organization, rather than the artists, shaped the AIDS content and context of each album.

The final two albums Red Hot produced before *America Is Dying Slowly* took aim at smaller audiences. *Red Hot and Bothered* (Kinetic, 1995) presented music from the indie rock scene and *Offbeat: A Red Hot Soundtrip* (WAX TRAX/TVT, 1996) featured ambient music, spoken word, and “triphop,” and included works by David Byrne, Moby, and Soul Coughing, among others. By 1996 John Carlin had successfully produced AIDS benefit albums in a wide variety of genres that featured an assortment of HIV-prevention messages – some more activist than others. He blanketed the market sonically so multiple audiences would be compelled to purchase Red Hot CDs.

Rap Gets Ready for A.I.D.S.

By the mid-1990s the status of AIDS in the United States shifted drastically from its standing in the late 1980s. On February 23, 1995, the gay, white Olympic Gold Medal diver Greg Louganis (b. 1960) shocked the world when he announced his HIV-positive serostatus.¹⁹ Also, Jonathan Larson’s (1960-1996) musical, *Rent*, opened on Broadway at

¹⁹ Louganis’s confession reminded the public yet again of the connection between blood and AIDS, as the media focused on when he had hit his head on the diving board at the Olympics in Seoul, South Korea in 1988. These are a few of the countless articles that discussed this topic: Athelia Knight, “Olympic Diving Star Louganis Says He Has AIDS: He Was HIV Positive in ‘88 Games,” *Washington Post*, 23 February 1995; Jere Longman, “Olympian Blood: Debate About HIV Tests Sparked by Diver with AIDS,” *New York Times*, 26 February 1995; and Anne Rochell, “Dispelling Myths About How Virus Is Transmitted,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 29 March 1995.

the Nederlander Theater on April 29, 1996 (just a few months after Larson died from an aortic aneurysm on January 25). Based on Puccini's opera *La bohème* (1896), the Tony and Pulitzer Prize-winning *Rent* included songs about AIDS, such as "One Song Glory" and "Life Support." These events, and others, helped continue to keep AIDS in the mainstream public eye.

For our purposes here, the most important event occurred on March 26, 1995, when Eazy-E (Eric Wright), the famed member of the gangsta rap group N.W.A. (Niggaz With Attitude), died of AIDS at age 31. Much like Freddie Mercury's death in 1991 stunned rock musicians, Wright's death shocked the rap community.²⁰ "N.W.A. was to rap what the Beatles were to rock," wrote one reporter.²¹ Wright's death did not garner as much attention in the general public as when Magic Johnson announced his HIV status, but when AIDS took the life of this highly regarded rapper it alarmed countless young African-American male and female consumers of rap, and it provoked an unprecedented response in rap communities.²² Most notably, another AIDS charity called "LIFEbeat: The Music Industry Fights AIDS," planned a concert, dubbed UrbanAID, to honor

²⁰ See, for example, Graham, "AIDS Death Jars Rap World."

²¹ Jim Derogatis, "Rapper's Last Message Hits Hardest," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 29 March 1995.

²² Sugar Shaft (Anthony Hardin), a longtime member of the hip-hop group the X-Clan, died of AIDS on 1 September 1995 at the age of 25. However, his death generated little attention from the media and did not have nearly the impact of Eazy-E's death. See Vladimir Bogdanov et al, *All Music Guide to Hip-Hop: The Definitive Guide to Rap and Hip-Hop* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), 509.

Wright. The concert brought a community together and allowed it to finally acknowledge – in a very public way – the fact that AIDS could kill young black men.²³ Whereas TLC’s “Waterfalls” helped bring the black female voice to cultural constructions of AIDS, Wright’s death particularly stunned straight young black men.²⁴ Until Wright’s death, the majority of the musicians most publicly associated with AIDS were black women, such as TLC and Salt-N-Pepa. Although male rappers had been rapping about AIDS in their music since the 1980s, the women had gained the majority of the public’s attention.²⁵ Wright’s death, therefore, drew attention to another one of the groups at the highest risk to contract HIV – young African-American men.

Wright promoted an image of black hyper-masculinity. Just a few days before he died, Wright called a press conference to announce his HIV-positive serostatus to the world. At a press conference an attorney read a letter from Wright announcing that Wright had AIDS. This is an excerpt from the letter:

²³ For more on this concert, see Karen Hunter, “AIDS Takes the Rap with Death of Eazy E: Hip Hop Responds to Disease in a B.I.G. Way,” *Daily News* (New York), 3 October 1993; and James T. Jones, “R&B Responds to AIDS,” *USA Today*, 23 May 1995.

²⁴ For a fascinating – fictional – discussion concerning the impact of Wright’s death on young black men, see James Earl Hardy, *The Day Eazy-E Died* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2002).

²⁵ Here is one example: In 1988 Boogie Down Productions said “Cos now in winter AIDS attacks / So run out and get your Jimmy Hats” in “Jimmy,” *By All Means Necessary* (Jive, 1988).

I've got thousands and thousands of young fans that have to learn what's real when it comes to AIDS. I'm not looking to blame anyone except myself. I've learned in the last week that this thing is real and it doesn't discriminate. It affects everyone. My girl, Tomika, and I have been together for four years, and we recently got married. She's good, she's kind, and a wonderful mother. We have a little boy who's a year old. Before Tomika, I had other women. I have seven children by six different mothers. Maybe success was too good to me.²⁶

Much like an AIDS activist, Wright says that AIDS "affects everyone" – even a man who had sex with numerous women and has fathered multiple children. Like Magic Johnson did in 1991, Wright exhibited a "defensive" heterosexuality.²⁷ In fact, he only used the word AIDS once in the entire letter.

Wright's death in 1995 directly affected the Red Hot Organization's desire to produce a rap album. John Carlin, the executive producer of *America Is Dying Slowly*, noted:

Some [rap] artists were very into it; some were not. But after the death of Eazy-E, everybody wanted to do it. They said, "Oh, God, this is serious; this really affects our community." That really woke people up.²⁸

Grace Harry, who helped create and develop the album, echoed Carlin's statements in her interviews:

²⁶ "Rap Star Eazy-E Battles AIDS: Listed In Critical Condition In LA Hospital," *Jet*, 3 April 1995.

²⁷ For one critical discussion of the response to Magic Johnson's announcement of his HIV-positive serostatus, see Douglas Crimp, "Accommodating Magic," in *Media Spectacles*, ed. Marjorie Garber, Jann Matlock, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (New York: Routledge, 1993), 255-66.

²⁸ Havelock Nelson, "Elektra Rap Compilation Targets AIDS," *Billboard*, 13 July 1996.

Eazy was the man, the player, and when he announced he had AIDS that sent people reeling. And when he died, forget it. There was nothing else being discussed in the community. A few artists who originally didn't want to be on the album called us right after Eazy died and said, "I'm ready."²⁹

After Wright's death these artists no longer felt that donating a song to the Red Hot Organization suggested an act in support of a virus that affects Others – donating a rap song could now be understood as a symbolic act in support of the black community and threatened black manhood. Wright's death changed the idea of AIDS, and, with it, the notion of an AIDS song.

Straight Up

America Is Dying Slowly confronted AIDS straightforwardly, in context and content, with repeated, direct references to HIV/AIDS. In "Listen to Me Now," Eightball and MJG imagine what it would be like to be the AIDS virus:

I have no face, I have no body, I have no heart I have no soul
 I don't care if you're young, if you're old
 Here's my mission, I'm out to get them, those who be slippin'
 Creepin', while they be creepin', I be enterin'
 Into them, silently, violently, that's not me
 Quietly, you'll never know I'm in your blood stream
 Swimming, I been injected, now you're infected
 And when you find me here it will be worse than you expected
 Temptation, that's how I get in, that's how I got in
 Information is what you lackin', now I'm attackin'
 Your mind, and body functions, don't seem to function
 Somethin', ain't how it used to be and it's because of me
 Killin' you, cold-blooded murderer

²⁹ Nazareth, "New CD Aimed at AIDS Awareness."

...

If you ain't realized by now, the description of the topic here is AIDS
Several amounts of times I will appear on the front page

The text is specific and descriptive, stressing the importance of information. In the song Eightball and MJG state clearly that they are talking about AIDS – no “three letters” here. A far cry from Symphony no. 1 and “Waterfalls,” the text is unambiguous. It reminds both that AIDS kills and that AIDS is preventable.

Most descriptions of AIDS in *America Is Dying Slowly* do not include quite this level of detail, but there are an assortment of direct references to HIV/AIDS, such as “I don't want to catch no HIV” (“No Rubber, No Backstage Pass”), “AIDS shit” (“Check Ya Self”), and “the world of AIDS” (“Stay Away from the Nasty Hoes”). Obviously, a safe sex message is more effective for any audience when it includes words like “sex,” “rubber,” “HIV,” and “condom.” Fat Joe (unlike TLC, for example) does not need a music video to clarify his phrase, “Practice safe sex never flex unprotected.” The title of “No Rubber, No Backstage Pass” is just as clear as the messages in the song:

I don't want to catch no HIV
So we'll protect you and me, but mainly me
If you don't want no rubber then P-E-A-C-E.

And in “Listen To Me Now,” a female voice laments, “I knew I shoulda told him to put a condom on.” Compared to the artists discussed in previous chapters like TLC, Janet Jackson, Elton John, etc., these artists preferred the “straight dope” to oblique references to AIDS.

Medical Apartheid

America Is Dying Slowly challenged predominant ideas about AIDS, including myths about the source of AIDS. While most of the songs on *America Is Dying Slowly* advocated the use of condoms, the album's namesake, the Wu Tang Clan's "America Is Dying Slowly," referred to another crucial topic relevant to young black men. In the carefully crafted lyrics from the third verse of this song, they suggest not only that condom use is important, but also they reference a longstanding idea that the C.I.A. developed AIDS with racist intentions:

My nigga Chuck, he loved to fuck
 Everything exotic bitches down to ugly ducks
 Like Nancy, who liked the fancy tickles
 So he put popsicles on her nipples to make her sex passion
 Triple quadruple, until she bust
 Overcome with passion, big ass want lust upon him
 But nigga he forsake to grab the condom
 Fuck it, he said AIDS was government made
 To keep niggaz afraid so they wont get laid no babies be made
 And the black population will decrease within a decade
 German warfare product against the dark shade

In this narrative, the Wu Tang Clan depicts "Chuck" as another promiscuous, hyper-masculine player – someone who the government could not scare into abstinence. While there are many unfounded beliefs about AIDS (e.g., that it can be spread by mosquitoes, toilets, or touching), the idea that "the government" invented AIDS to kill black people had a unique resonance with African-Americans.³⁰ A 1990 New York Times/WCBS-TV

³⁰ Velentin Zapevalov first started this rumor in an article for the Soviet newspaper *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (*Literary Gazette*) on October 30, 1985. See Mirko G.

poll (as well as a later Gallup/Newsweek poll) found that one in ten black people agreed with the statement that the government “deliberately created [AIDS] in a laboratory in order to infect black people,” and that an additional two in ten “thought that might be so.”³¹ In a 2005 study, 48% of African-American respondents agreed with the statement “HIV is a man-made virus” and 53% believed that “there is a cure for AIDS, but it is being withheld from the poor.”³² Such fears certainly were not limited to black people. Folklorists, such as Patricia Turner, have demonstrated that many people – gay and heterosexual, black and white, male and female – believe this particular theory.³³

There is ample evidence that black Americans should be distrustful of the government in matters of public health, and Harriet Washington’s compelling 2006 book, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans*

Grmek, “Some Unorthodox Views and a Selection Hypothesis on the Origin of the AIDS Viruses,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 50 (1995): 253-73.

³¹ “The AIDS ‘Plot’ against Blacks,” *New York Times*, 12 May 1992. A particularly good study of AIDS and blackness is Cathy J. Cohen’s *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). For more on AIDS and black Americans, see Samuel V. Duh, *Blacks and AIDS: Causes and Origins* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1999), esp. 8-32, 137-42. For more on how communities of color have mobilized to fight the spread of HIV infection, see Brett C. Stockdill, “Forging Unity: Grassroots AIDS Activism in Communities of Color,” in *Activism against AIDS: At the Intersection of Sexuality, Race, Gender, and Class* (Boulder, Col.: Lynne Rienner, 2003).

³² Darryl Fears, “Study: Many Blacks Cite AIDS Conspiracy,” *Washington Post*, 25 January 2005.

³³ Patricia A. Turner, *I Heard It through the Grapevine: Rumor in African-American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 151-64.

from Colonial Times to the Present looks not just at transgressions from hundreds of years ago, but also at more recent experiments with HIV-positive children, most of whom are black or Hispanic.³⁴ Additionally, Washington, a visiting fellow at Chicago's DePaul University, interrogates research that casts doubt on the effectiveness of AZT in black populations, questions the effectiveness of protease inhibitors among blacks as compared to whites, points out racial disparities in HIV vaccine trials, and presents other disheartening comments concerning the future of HIV vaccine research. What is more, she points out that black men are currently ten times as likely to develop AIDS as white men and that AIDS diagnoses in black women are twenty-five times more common than in white women.³⁵ Thus, there is an explanation for Chuck's suggestion in "America Is Dying Slowly" that the government created AIDS.

The most notorious of medical experiments involving black people is the Tuskegee study. The Tuskegee study, spanning from 1932 to 1972, denied penicillin to black men infected with syphilis. The Tuskegee study caused unnecessary pain and suffering, and in 1973 the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) filed a class-action lawsuit that eventually awarded more than \$9 million to the

³⁴ Harriet A. Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 330-46.

³⁵ Washington, *Medical Apartheid*, 330.

unwitting participants. On May 16, 1997 (after *America Is Dying Slowly*) President Clinton apologized on behalf of the nation.

Another mid-1990s rap song demonstrates the influence of Tuskegee. The hip-hop group Public Enemy promoted this same conspiracy theory about AIDS well before Red Hot released *America Is Dying Slowly*. Their “Race Against Time,” from just two years before (1994), included the following verse:

Bigger damage than the trigger and glocks
Mass murder in mass from a
Blanket full a small pox
No guarantees gettin lesser fees
In Tuskegee blacks got shot
Wit disease

Furthermore, in the song they suggested that the doctors at the World Health Organization created AIDS to murder blacks and then “blamed it on some Green African monkey.”³⁶

It is likely that Public Enemy directly influenced the Wu Tang Clan. Public Enemy, led by Chuck D, has influenced many other rap groups, and they have long promoted AIDS conspiracy theories. *New York Times* critic Peter Watrous described one Public Enemy concert from 1990:

Like most Public Enemy shows, this one moved from brilliant and urgent dance music to comical tirades. The concert opened with a speech by Richard Griffin – known as Professor Griff – in which he contended that the AIDS epidemic was

³⁶ Public Enemy, “Race against Time,” *Muse Sick-n-Hour Mess Age* (Def Jam/Columbia, 1994).

propagated as an experiment by the governments of the United States and the Soviet Union.³⁷

What is more, Chuck D, in particular, has a large audience for his ideas. He is the author of a best selling autobiography.³⁸ He regularly speaks on the college lecture circuit. Rock the Vote honored him with the Patrick Lippert Award in 1996 for his contributions to community service. He has been a national spokesperson for the National Urban League and the National Alliance of African American Athletes. Chuck D has appeared in public service announcements for HBO's campaign for national peace and the Partnership for a Drug Free America, and he is also a regular guest on numerous television shows including Nightline, Politically Incorrect, and CNN.³⁹ He believes that his music influences his audience, and he is famous for calling rap music the "black CNN." More recently, in 2003, when this author asked Chuck D if he thought his music could affect perceptions of AIDS he avoided the question and instead suggested that the government created AIDS to kill black people.⁴⁰

³⁷ Peter Watrous, "Rap and Politics from Public Enemy," *New York Times*, 3 January 1990.

³⁸ Chuck D., *Fight the Power: Rap, Race, and Reality* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1997).

³⁹ For a more complete biography of Chuck D, see Public Enemy's official Web site, www.publicenemy.com.

⁴⁰ Chuck D spoke as part of the Distinguished Lecture Series in the Wisconsin Union Theater on the campus of the University of Wisconsin-Madison on Monday, March 10, 2003. As part of the question and answer session after his talk, I asked him about the role of his music in shaping perceptions about AIDS.

Returning to Wu Tang Clan's "America Is Dying Slowly," it is possible that the nuances of Chuck's ideas about AIDS could be lost on audiences. But, again, a careful reading of this song shows how it promotes the same kinds of ideas AIDS activists promoted. The "short message" of the song "America Is Dying Slowly" is that "players" should practice safe sex or they will end up like Chuck – regardless of the origins of the AIDS. The message is not much different from saying, "AIDS is not a gay disease" or "AIDS affects everyone." Like a caseworker at an AIDS Service Organization that speaks the language of his or her clients – and like Corigliano's Symphony no. 1 – "America Is Dying Slowly" speaks in a particular language suited to a particular audience.

Woman As *Femme Fatale*

The album *America Is Dying Slowly* also debunked the idea that someone could not contract HIV through oral sex. The title alone of Fat Joe's contribution to this album is explicit – "(Stay Away from the) Nasty Hoes" – and the second verse of the song conveys a well-known urban legend in which an HIV-positive woman seduces an unsuspecting HIV-negative man. Here are the first four lines of the second verse:

Welcome to the world of AIDS is what she wrote
 On the mirror with the red lipstick before I woke
 Who would ever think that this would happen to me
 Bitch hit me off with HIV, purposely

Numerous newspapers in the United States (such as the *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Seattle Times*, and *San Francisco Examiner*) as well as other parts of the world had printed stories about this narrative, and Gary Alan Fine discussed the different versions in his

1987 article, “Welcome to the World of AIDS: Fantasies of Female Revenge.”⁴¹ Fine argues that for men the story brings up to date the long history of narratives concerning “the evil woman, the castrator” and plays on “their collective paranoia toward women.”⁴² When Eazy-E died, he stressed that he had slept with many women, tacitly suggesting to a generation of young black men that women were the source of AIDS. “(Stay Away from the) Nasty Hoes” is one reaction to Eazy-E’s death, and it puts a modern twist on the old notion of the *femme fatale*. Unlike the deadly woman narrative in TLC’s “Waterfalls,” the woman with the red lipstick in “(Stay Away from the) Nasty Hoes” is more malevolent. It is difficult to determine her precise intentions from the phrase “Welcome to the world of AIDS,” but the story makes it clear that men should fear her. She is diseased, and she is deadly.

Of course Fat Joe does not want his audiences to think he has anything to do with the “world of AIDS,” so he reinforces his normative masculinity and denies any rumors about his serostatus by ending the verse with the statement, “I ain’t really got AIDS, it’s just a motherfuckin record.” More importantly, though, he offers a warning that AIDS can spread through oral sex (“you can catch it goin’ downtown”) and Fat Joe recommends using a condom (“never flex unprotected”). Other rap musicians from this period specifically mentioned condoms, sex, and AIDS, but many of them conveyed

⁴¹ Gary Alan Fine, “Welcome to the World of AIDS: Fantasies of Female Revenge,” *Western Folklore* 46 (1987): 192-7.

⁴² Fine, “Welcome to the World of AIDS,” 197.

drastically different messages. For example, in Big L's 1995 "Danger Zone" – not from *America Is Dying Slowly* – Big L says, "I never wear rubbers bitch, if I get AIDS, fuck it!"⁴³

Reception

There were rap albums before *America Is Dying Slowly* that had provoked much more controversy. For example, Ice Cube's *Death Certificate* (Priority Records, 1991), triggered inflammatory articles, nationwide boycotts, and questions regarding whether or not an album could cause violence.⁴⁴ *America Is Dying Slowly*, in comparison, did not discuss cop killing or cause much of a stir in the mainstream press. Salim Muwakkil, writing in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, said:

Some encouraging trends, such as a series of recent recording collaborations, including "America Is Dying Slowly" by the Red Hot Organization, indicate that hip-hop musicians are responding more aggressively to the AIDS threat.⁴⁵

Billboard magazine, which rarely offers anything that resembles criticism, offered an oblique reference to fact that the songs did not equate AIDS with gay men:

⁴³ Big L., "Danger Zone," *Lifestylez ov da Poor and Dangerous* (Columbia, 1995).

⁴⁴ A particularly good telling of the reception of *Death Certificate* can be found in Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 331-53.

⁴⁵ Salim Muwakkil, "Black Leaders Ignore AIDS Threat," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 11 December 1996.

On the album “America Is Dying Slowly” (Elektra), several best-selling rappers, including Wu-Tang Clan, the Lost Boyz, Chubb Rock, Biz Markie, and Coolio drop discourse about the AIDS virus. Atop tracks that thump and bump, the artists maraud for African-American ears with hardedged rhymes that sometimes run counter to mainstream society’s interpretation of the disease.⁴⁶

Both of these articles recommend *America Is Dying Slowly*. The *Billboard* article suggests that the artists on the album directed their messages toward “African-American ears,” but *America Is Dying Slowly* certainly spoke to an audience that included other races.

On the other hand, many reviewers, particularly from the black community, voiced their displeasure with *America Is Dying Slowly*. dream hampton, an accomplished hip-hop critic accustomed to defending rappers when “outsiders try to reduce them to monster misogynists and murderers,”⁴⁷ disparaged *America Is Dying Slowly*. In her article for POZ magazine, a magazine for people who are HIV-positive, this black woman voiced her concerns about the album. She accurately characterized the album as “boys warning other boys that pussies are on fire.”⁴⁸ Though she recognizes the importance of these rappers discussing AIDS, she expressed dismay that women on the album carried all of the blame for AIDS. She did not advocate censorship, but she felt that Carlin and the Red Hot organization should have acted more responsibly. When she

⁴⁶ Nelson, “Elektra Rap Compilation Targets AIDS.”

⁴⁷ dream hampton, “Confessions of a Critic,” *Essence*, August 1994.

⁴⁸ hampton, “AIDS Gets a Bad Rap,” *POZ* 17 (1996): 74-7, 101.

asked John Carlin, the executive producer, about the depiction of women on the album, he replied that the Red Hot Organization does “not censor anything the artists have to say.”⁴⁹ Carlin must have believed that young black men would be more likely to buy his album if it sounded like other rap music – and other rap music talked about “bitches.”

Not everyone in the Red Hot Organization welcomed criticism. After the release of Red Hot’s first album, *Red, Hot and Blue*, some reviewers complained that the interpretations of Cole Porter’s songs did not do justice to Porter’s music. Leigh Blake, the co-creator and producer of *Red, Hot and Blue* with John Carlin, responded to the criticism, saying, “If reviewers are going to be so negative, I’d rather they left it alone. We want to reach people, educate them in AIDS awareness and most of all we want to make lots of money.”⁵⁰ Blake and Carlin believed that their albums – and the rap songs in particular – had the potential to reach audiences that could not be reached through traditional methods, and they repeated that sentiment over and over again in interviews. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, they were in it to raise money – not just for themselves, but also for AIDS organizations. Grace Harry, for example, believed that rappers – specifically the ones on *America Is Dying Slowly* – were “the ones who are educating our [black] kids.”⁵¹ For the Red Hot Organization, “It’s all about making it

⁴⁹ hampton, “AIDS Gets a Bad Rap.”

⁵⁰ Robert Yates, “Moralising the Majority,” *Guardian* (London), 25 October 1990.

⁵¹ Nazareth, “New CD Aimed at AIDS Awareness.”

cool to wear a condom.”⁵² They want to reach the people who do not or cannot read about AIDS in newspapers and magazines and people who do not own a television. They want to raise money, but, to borrow Chuck D’s statement, they also want their albums to function like CNN.

Music and AIDS Organizations

There are a number of organizations in the United States devoted to using music to raise money for AIDS charities and/or promote AIDS consciousness. The Red Hot Organization is one of only a few that uses the music *album* as a vehicle for social change. In fact, the musicians who have made albums for the Red Hot Organization – more than anyone else – successfully integrated HIV prevention into music. The following sections will briefly touch on a few of the largest organizations in the United States in order to locate the Red Hot Organization – and *America Is Dying Slowly* – within this larger musical community of musicians, producers, and executives who want to help end AIDS.

The Red Hot albums simply have no peers. Other AIDS charities have a musical component, but for many their primary activity is distributing grant money. These organizations raise money rather than produce albums. MusiCares – the philanthropic arm of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS) and the first

⁵² Yates, “Moralising the Majority.”

music-themed organization to raise money for AIDS – started in 1989.⁵³ MusicCares helps people with AIDS by offering financial assistance. Another organization of this type is the Elton John AIDS Foundation, which started in 1992.⁵⁴ John decided to donate proceeds from all of his singles to his AIDS foundation. As discussed in the previous chapter, most of John’s music does not mention AIDS. He helps AIDS organizations through his charity, which distributes money and educates about AIDS. Although the Elton John AIDS Foundation is more acutely focused on “the elimination of prejudice

⁵³ According to their Web site (www.grammy.com/MusiCares):

It is the mission of MusiCares to ensure that music people have a place to turn in times of financial, medical or personal crisis. Its primary purpose is to focus the attention and resources of the music industry on human services issues that directly impact the health and welfare of music people. . . . This program offers financial assistance for medical expenses including doctor, dental and hospital bills, prescriptions, addiction recovery treatment, psychotherapy, treatment for HIV/AIDS, Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s and other critical illnesses, as well as basic living expenses such as rent and utilities.

⁵⁴ The mission of the Elton John AIDS Foundation is:

to provide funding for educational programs targeted at HIV/AIDS prevention and/or the elimination of prejudice and discrimination against HIV/AIDS-affected individuals, and for programs that provide services to people living with or at risk for HIV/AIDS.

It took Elton John a while before he came to AIDS activism. He said, “I really wasn’t doing what I should as a gay man because I was a drug addict at the time and slightly self-obsessed. I always regret not being out in the forefront of the protest.” Shadi Rahimi, “Celebrities Stay True to the AIDS Cause,” *New York Times*, 10 November 2005.

and discrimination,”⁵⁵ it is still comparable to MusiCares in that it provides money for AIDS causes without confrontational campaigning.

In addition to offering grant money, some organizations engage in separate HIV prevention efforts. In 1991, music promoter/manager Bob Caviano wrote in *Billboard* magazine that the music industry needed “a foundation to offer basic assistance and advice on how to obtain essential services – food and shelter, medicine and health care – and a clearinghouse for information on such things as prescriptions, doctors, and emotional support groups.”⁵⁶ The next spring he founded LIFEbeat with the help of other music executives. Today their activities remain music-focused, but their music does not necessarily have any connection to AIDS:

LIFEbeat is dedicated to reaching America’s youth with the message of HIV/AIDS prevention. LIFEbeat mobilizes the talents and resources of the music industry to raise awareness and to provide support to the AIDS community.

Like *America Is Dying Slowly*, LIFEbeat targets youth. Unlike MusiCares and the Elton John AIDS Foundation, LIFEbeat concentrates on HIV prevention through education. They partner with high profile musicians, like Jewel and Ozzy Osbourne, touring with musicians around the country and reaching out to “local AIDS service organizations (ASOs) to assist in providing concert-goers with important HIV/AIDS literature,

⁵⁵ For more about his foundation and its mission, see www.ejaf.org.

⁵⁶ Bob Caviano, “Music People with AIDS Need Help: Industry Should Give More Support,” *Billboard*, 14 December 1991.

condoms, and information on testing and counseling services in their area.”⁵⁷ LIFEbeat sets up tables at concerts to help distribute information about AIDS. They have an “on-going live performance series for people living with HIV/AIDS,” called Hearts and Voices. Recall, also, that they sponsored the concert after Eazy-E died. Additionally, they sponsor PSAs featuring well-known musicians like Destiny’s Child and N’ Sync. LIFEbeat takes their messages of HIV prevention to the radio waves, VH1, and BET (Black Entertainment Television), but for the most part they do so without creating specific musical responses to HIV/AIDS (i.e., non-PSAs).

Classical Action: Performing Artists Against AIDS began in January 1993 and is the most similar to the Red Hot Organization in that it sells the CDs it produces in order to raise money for AIDS. Additionally, Classical Action sponsors events, sells merchandise, and puts on concerts to raise money for AIDS charities. In October 1997, Classical Action became a fundraising program of the New York-based Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS, a fundraising organization associated with the American Theatre community that has awarded more than \$66 million since 1987.⁵⁸ Classical Action features internationally known musicians like Cecilia Bartoli, Anne-Sophie Mutter, Dawn Upshaw, Joshua Bell, Lynn Harrell, James Galway, André Watts, Renée

⁵⁷ This statement comes from their Web site, lifebeat.org.

⁵⁸ For more information about the Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS grants, see their Web site www.broadwaycares.org.

Fleming, and, of course, John Corigliano, and has raised more than \$6 million for AIDS charities.⁵⁹

There are many other organizations involved in these kinds of activities – to this list one could add the Estate Project for Artists with AIDS, One World Beat, and countless other local organizations. There have been a great number of short-lived or one-time concerts intended to raise AIDS awareness, and these are difficult to track. To be sure, musicians have raised a lot of money for people with AIDS. The Red Hot Organization is unique because it embeds prevention messages into musical works, which in turn become catalysts for discussions about AIDS. Not all of their albums contain AIDS-related music, but most of them contain at least one musical work that refers specifically to AIDS, and they always include information about AIDS in the album jackets.

Extending the Reach

America Is Dying Slowly, in particular, reaches beyond traditional HIV prevention. As the sociologist George Lewis has pointed out repeatedly, the fact that music is not often seen as a serious political activity gives musicians a unique opportunity to affect social movements.⁶⁰ Organizations that are involved in HIV prevention rarely

⁵⁹ For more about this organization, visit their Web site, www.classicalaction.org.

⁶⁰ George H. Lewis, “*Da Kine* Sounds: The Function of Music as Social Protest in the New Hawaiian Renaissance,” *American Music* 2, no. 2 (1984): 40. See also George

incorporate music into their prevention efforts, instead allowing albums like *America Is Dying Slowly* to function on their own. The symbolic meaning and context of this album – as an AIDS album – is almost as important as its specific lyric content. *America Is Dying Slowly* succeeds because it contains music by men that warns other men about the importance of safe sex. The songs identify a problem (AIDS), but they also propose a solution to the problem (condoms).

One shortcoming of this album, however, is its exclusion of female rappers. Grace Harry, who helped produce the album, said:

I reached out to every female artist and if they're not on, it's not my fault. I agree that a lot of the lyrics are misogynistic, but that's the way these guys feel. It's sad and that's why I wanted women so they could present their point of view.⁶¹

Harry seems to believe that had she been successful in getting women to be part of the album that it somehow would have counterbalanced the misogynistic music.

The musicians on *America Is Dying Slowly* made the argument that safe sex should be a priority, and they invested their arguments with musical force. Unlike pamphlets and other traditional methods of communication, these artists drew on pre-

H. Lewis, "The Role of Music in Popular Social Movements: A Theory and Case Study of the Island State of Hawaii, USA," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 16 (1985): 153-62; Lewis, "Social Protest and Self Awareness in Black Popular Music," *Popular Music and Society* 2 (1973): 327-33; and Lewis, "The Structure of Support in Social Movements: An Analysis of Organization and Resource Mobilization in the Youth Contra-Culture," *British Journal of Sociology* 27 (1976): 184-96.

⁶¹ Nazareth, "New CD Aimed at AIDS Awareness."

existing musical genres and conventions to remind young sexually active black men to wear condoms. The resulting message had the potential to be much more powerful than any slogan. Far from “politically correct,” this chapter has shown that because of the album’s explicit character, it may have had a much better chance at educating young audiences about the dangers of unsafe sex. Rap music contained frequent references to “bitches” and “hoes” and conspiracy theories about AIDS, so some rap consumers surely welcomed this album that added pleas for safer sex.

Before *America Is Dying Slowly* a relatively small number of musicians confronted the AIDS epidemic directly in their music. Rather than the beginning of something new, however, *America Is Dying Slowly* came toward the end of the period that witnessed the largest production of American musical responses to AIDS. The next chapter illustrates how after 1996 forces much more powerful than the Red Hot Organization contributed to the decline in the already small number of musical responses to AIDS in the United States. Though Red Hot’s *America Is Dying Slowly* album filled an important need, few individual or collective works of a similar nature would follow it. This album is thus a beginning and an end, remarkable both for its uniqueness and its position in history.

Chapter 5

“When Plagues End”: Musical Responses to AIDS since 1996

Not long after the Red Hot Organization released *America Is Dying Slowly* on June 25, 1996, the cultural construction of AIDS in the United States shifted from national (epidemic) to global (pandemic), and with regards to music, this shift can be traced to two significant events in 1996: the development of protease inhibitors and the passing of the 1996 Telecommunications Act. First, with the development of the new AIDS drugs in 1996, becoming HIV-positive no longer equaled a “death sentence.” On November 10, 1996 *New York Times Magazine* published an article by Andrew Sullivan with the provocative title, “When Plagues End: Notes on the Twilight of an Epidemic.” Sullivan wrote:

The power of the newest drugs, called protease inhibitors, and the even greater power of those now in the pipeline, is such that a diagnosis of H.I.V. infection is not just different in degree today than, say, five years ago. It is different in kind. It no longer signifies death. It merely signifies illness.¹

Doctors could not cure people with AIDS, but the new drugs allowed doctors to effectively treat people with AIDS. At that time protease inhibitor therapies were highly effective, but they were very expensive (up to \$25,000 annually), and they required that patients take their pills every eight hours on an empty stomach.² Despite the provocative

¹ Andrew Sullivan, “When Plagues End: Notes on the Twilight of an Epidemic,” *New York Times Magazine*, 10 November 1996, 54.

² There have been some considerable advances in AIDS treatment in the past decade. Some AIDS drug regimens once required dozens of pills each day, so when the

headline, Sullivan conceded that AIDS had not ended, but rather that protease inhibitors had made a diagnosis of HIV infection “different in degree” and “different in kind.” Less than a month later, on December 2, the cover of *Newsweek* asked, “The End of AIDS?”³ Like Sullivan’s article, the *Newsweek* article explained, “This is not the end of the plague.” Then a couple of weeks later, *Time* magazine named the AIDS researcher David Ho “Man of the Year.”⁴ By and large, though, it seemed that everything started falling into place, and as Greg Behrman suggested, “most Americans, and most in the activist community, were happy to make the comforting presumption that the AIDS threat was over.”⁵ 1996 saw what would be the last display of the AIDS Quilt. The next year the CDC reported that in 1996 deaths in the United States from AIDS decreased for the first

FDA approved the first single pill in July 2006, it marked a major breakthrough. See, for example, Marc Kaufman, “FDA Clears Once-a-Day AIDS Drug: Single-Pill Regimen Hailed as Milestone,” *Washington Post*, 13 July 2006; Andrew Pollack, “New Medicine for AIDS Is One Pill, Once a Day,” *New York Times*, 9 July 2006; and Sabin Russell, “FDA OKs New Pill to Fight AIDS: One-a-Day Dose of Three-Drug Combination Marks a Milestone in 25-Year History of the Disease,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 13 July 2006.

³ John Leland and Jeanne Gordon, “The End of AIDS?” *Newsweek*, 2 December 1996.

⁴ Howard Chua-Eoan, “The Tao of Ho,” *Time*, 30 December 1996.

⁵ Greg Behrman, *The Invisible People: How the U.S. Has Slept through the Global AIDS Pandemic, the Greatest Humanitarian Catastrophe of Our Time* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 135.

time in the history of the epidemic, and by 1997 AIDS dropped from the 8th to the 14th leading cause of death in the United States.⁶

There are countless measures that illustrate the influence of protease inhibitors in the United States. For example, Joseph Dalton, the former head of CRI (Composers' Recordings Inc.),⁷ runs the music program of the Estate Project for Artists with AIDS, and has been tracking information about composers with AIDS.⁸ As part of his research he tracks AIDS death dates by year, and although he has not been able to identify any female composers who have died of AIDS, his findings, shown in figure 17, are helpful because they illustrate the dramatic decrease in deaths after mid-decade. On the Estate Project Web site, Dalton admits that these are not the results of a rigorous scientific study. But not surprisingly, CDC measures of national trends, shown in figure 18, corroborate Dalton's findings as they too report a dramatic decline in deaths around the middle of the decade.

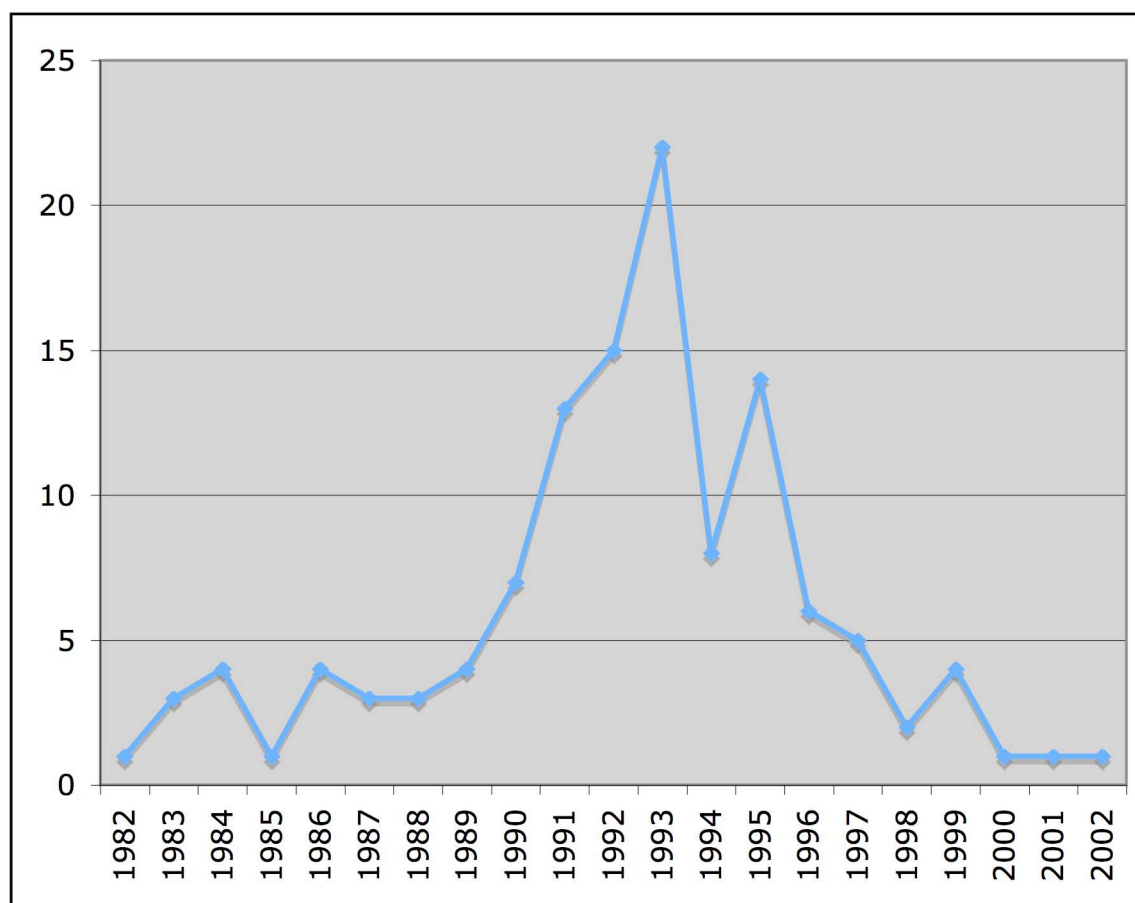
⁶ The two reports are: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Update: Trends in AIDS Incidence – United States, 1996"; and CDC, "Births and Deaths: Preliminary Data for 1997," *National Vital Statistics Report* 47, no. 4 (1998): 6.

⁷ For more on Dalton's tenure at CRI, see Allan Kozinn, "New-Music Label Loses a Champion: After 10 Years at Composers' Haven, the Director Decides to Resign," *New York Times*, 29 May 2000.

⁸ John Corigliano is one of the advisers to the Estate Project. For more on the Estate Project's music program, see Glenn Collins, "Ill Artists' Effort to Insure That Art Survives AIDS," *New York Times*, 27 December 1992; and Anne Midgette, "A Practical Muse for Musicians with AIDS," *New York Times*, 2 May 2002.

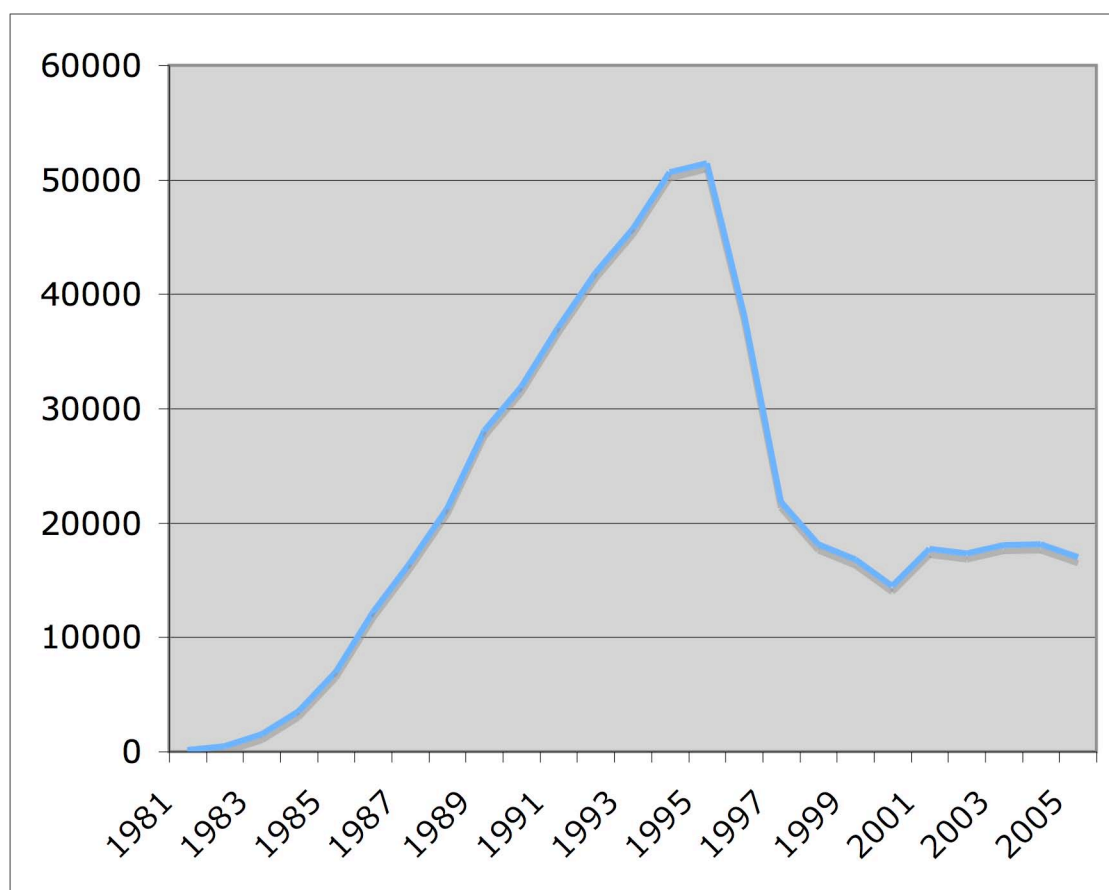
Another measure does not concern death, but it follows the same pattern of peaking around mid-decade: the performance history of Symphony no. 1, as shown in figure 19. Each of these three graphs peak around the same time, so the performance

Figure 17. Composer deaths from AIDS by year.⁹



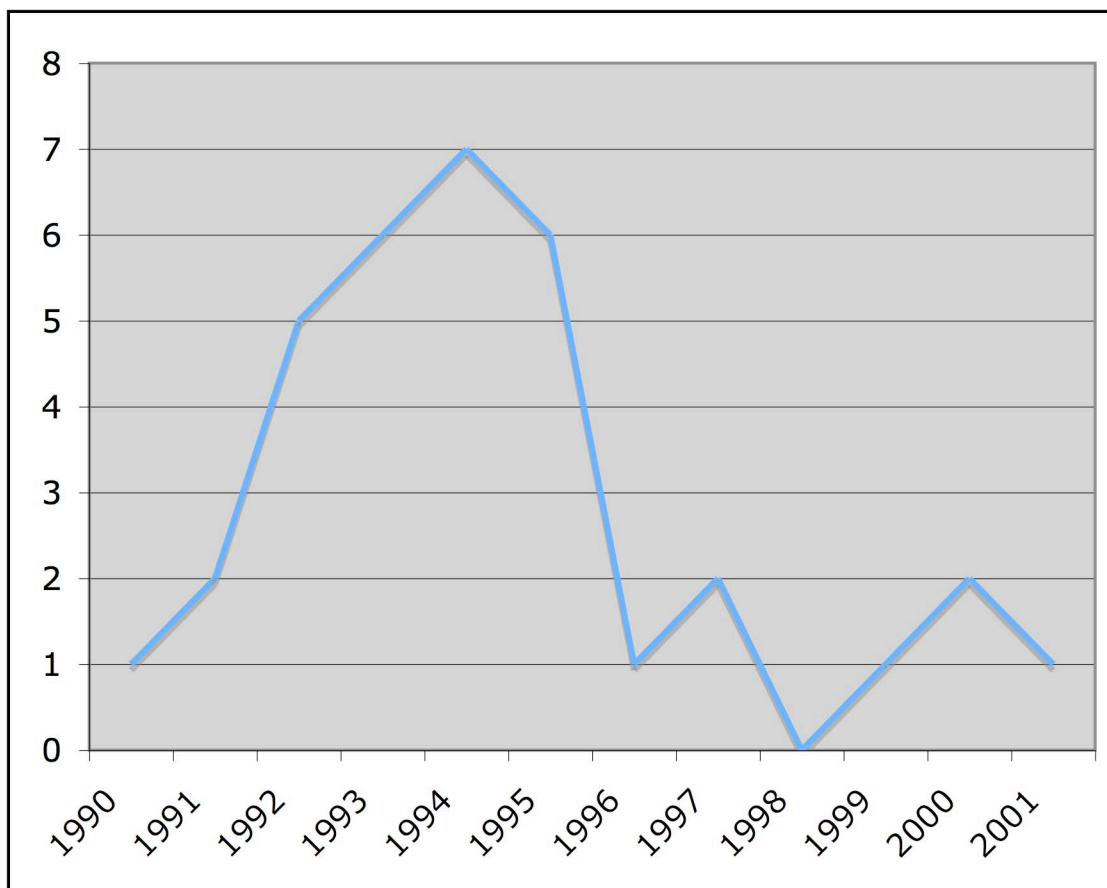
⁹ This information comes from www.artistswithaids.org/artforms/music/introduction.html

Figure 18. AIDS deaths in the United States by year.¹⁰



¹⁰ This graph combines data from two different reports: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report* 17, no. 1 (2006): 16-7; and CDC, *HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report* 13, no. 2 (2001): 30.

Figure 19. Performance History of John Corigliano's Symphony no. 1 among the 125 Orchestras in the United States with the Largest Budgets (see Appendix B for more details).



history of Symphony no. 1 is yet another measure that demonstrates how significantly the AIDS landscape in the United States had changed by 1996. It is indicative not just of how strongly Symphony no. 1 became associated with AIDS, but also how powerfully the biomedical epidemic influenced the “epidemic of signification.”

Whereas the development of protease inhibitors in 1996 significantly affected the construction AIDS, the 1996 Telecommunications Act, “an Act to promote competition

and reduce regulation,” affected the consumption of music.¹¹ This landmark legislation benefited big media conglomerates, especially Clear Channel Communications, who bought up radio stations and homogenized playlists.¹² As Jeff Chang argues, the new landscape made it difficult for independent artists and distributors to compete as content became more sanitized – hip hop went mainstream.¹³ If musicians wanted to succeed in this new environment, they needed to create music that could reach national or global audiences.

Recent albums by the Red Hot Organization reflect this changing landscape. The six albums before *America Is Dying Slowly* all featured American music, and four of the six albums that came after it featured “world music.” They went from producing albums with blues, dance, alternative, country, jazz, trip hop, and gangsta rap, to “the Bossa Nova sound that has seduced people around the globe for decades” on *Red Hot and Rio* (Verve Antilles, 1996), the music of “Latin America and the Latino community” on *Silencio = Muerte: Red Hot and Latin* (H.O.L.A., 1997), the sounds of “the Portuguese travel routes” on *Onda Sonora: Red Hot and Lisbon* (Bar/None, 1998), and music “from

¹¹ As quoted in Thomas W. Hazlett, “Physical Scarcity, Rent Seeking, and the First Amendment,” *Columbia Law Review* 97 (1997): 905.

¹² In 1996 Clear Channel owned about 40 stations and now they own more than 1200 stations. See, for example, Greg Gatlin, “FCC Sees Warning in Look at Radio: Media Ownership Rules May Loosen,” *Boston Herald*, 21 January 2003; and Jeff Leeds, “Music Promoter to Abandon a Radio Policy He Developed,” *New York Times*, 3 November 2005.

¹³ Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*, 439-45.

across the African Diaspora – Urban America, Brazil, Cuba, Europe and West Africa” on *Red Hot and Riot: The Music and Spirit of Fela Kuti* (MCA, 2002).¹⁴

The already-small amount of hip-hop music with an AIDS context decreased further after 1996, but in 2001 a group of musicians calling themselves “Artists Against AIDS Worldwide” released *What’s Going On* (Columbia), and it, too, reflected the changing cultural climate.¹⁵ An AIDS benefit album consisting of remakes of Marvin Gaye’s 1971 song “What’s Going On,” it featured a long list of superstars, including Christina Aguilera, Backstreet Boys, Mary J. Blige, Bono, Destiny’s Child, Jermaine Dupri, Fred Durst, Eve, Nelly Furtado, Nona Gaye (Marvin’s daughter), Ja Rule, Alicia Keys, Lil’ Kim, Jennifer Lopez, Nas, Nelly, ‘N Sync, P. Diddy, Britney Spears, Gwen Stefani, Michael Stipe, TLC (T-Boz and Chilli sang one line), Usher, and others. Bono (discussed in Chapter 3) spearheaded the project, and part of the reason he got so many musicians involved was because they were all going to be in New York for the MTV

¹⁴ The other two albums were distinctly American and featured the music of George Gershwin (*Red Hot and Rhapsody*, Verve/Antilles, 1998) and Duke Ellington (*Red Hot and Indigo*, Red Hot Organization, 2000). Additionally, in conjunction with the New Museum of Contemporary Art, the Red Hot Organization released *Optic Nerve: David Wojnarowicz on CD-ROM* in 1999, which featured the artwork of Wojnarowicz (who did the album art for U2’s “One”).

¹⁵ Of course music with an AIDS context did not disappear after the mid-1990s. For example, on their 2002 album *Phrenology* (Geffen Records), the Roots included the following line in their song “The Seed (2.0)”: “I push my seed in her bush for life . . . I push my seed somewhere deep in her chest. I push it naked cuz I’ve takin my test.”

Video Music Awards on September 6, 2001.¹⁶ The description of the album in the CD case is worth quoting at length:

On September 5-7, we came together in New York City to re-record Marvin Gay's classic song "What's Going On."

It was everyone's hope that, as in the past, this song would unite a generation in an effort to eliminate AIDS in Africa where the epidemic is destroying an entire continent.

In the wake of the tragic attacks on September 11, we feel compelled to recognize the victims of the more than 60 nations and their loved ones as well.

The proceeds for the "What's Going On" release are intended to benefit the following organizations: The September 11th Fund of the United Way until the end of 2001, Artists Against AIDS Worldwide, the Global AIDS Alliance, and others.

"What's Going On" is a question everyone is asking. Our answer is to unite, to create a global community based on safety, compassion, and healing. It is also a call to action.

This album had all the features of the new climate: a superstar cast, a focus on the global pandemic, and the backing of the biggest media conglomerate of them all, Clear Channel. On September 21, 2001, Clear Channel, who controlled more than a quarter of the radio stations in the country, broadcasted "What's Going On" on their radio stations in each time zone at 5 p.m.¹⁷ MTV also played the song at 4:56 ET on "Total Request Live" with

¹⁶ For more on the recording session in New York, see, for example, Glenn Gamboa, "Rock Stars Unite on Recording to Benefit AIDS," *Seattle Times*, 12 September 2001; and Mark Memmott, "What's Going On: A Song to Fight AIDS," *USA Today*, 6 September 2001.

¹⁷ For additional details about the September 21 broadcast, see, for example, Edna Gundersen and Susan Wloszczyna, "*What's Going On* CD Is Going on the Air Today,"

footage from the recording sessions. When the CD came out the next month (October), the CD, the case, and the album jacket all featured an outline of Africa. Incidentally, this project contained just one direct reference to HIV/AIDS – when Lil’ Kim ended her verse of the “Dupri R&B Mix” with the phrase “Let’s find a cure for A.I.D.S.”

Local Scene

Not all AIDS music after 1996 had an international audience, and some songs on the local and regional levels treated AIDS more directly. For instance, in 1997 Bob Rivers, host of the “Bob Rivers Show” at KZOK in Seattle who has released numerous parodies, recorded a song called “Hello, I Love You (Let’s Get Tested).”¹⁸ This song, a parody of the Doors’ classic, “Hello, I Love You,” is similar to Weird Al Yankovich’s style of parody.¹⁹ Whereas much of the music discussed in previous chapters functioned as elegies or cautionary tales (e.g., Corigliano’s Symphony no. 1, TLC’s “Waterfalls,” Janet Jackson’s “Together Again”), Rivers’s song stressed, in comic fashion, the importance of getting tested. This song has AIDS content, but by using this well known

USA Today, 21 September 2001; and George Rush and Joanna Molloy, “Raising Money and Spirits,” *New York Daily News*, 21 September 2001.

¹⁸ Bob Rivers, “Hello, I Love You (Let’s Get Tested),” *The Best of Twisted Tunes*, Vol. 2 (Atlantic, 1997).

¹⁹ Several Web sites, including seeklyrics.com and lyricsandsongs.com, erroneously attribute “Hello, I Love You (Let’s Get Tested)” to Weird Al. For more on the original version, see Jerry Hopkins and Danny Sugerman, *No One Here Gets Out Alive* (New York: Warner Books, 1995), 59, 195-6, et al.

melody, it gives the original version an AIDS context, and both songs have the potential to raise AIDS consciousness.

Dan Bern's "Cure for AIDS" (1998) is another unabashed musical response to HIV/AIDS that treats AIDS directly. Bern, who sometimes performs as "Bernstein," is a singer/songwriter who envisions what might happen if scientists discover a cure for AIDS. His answer: lots and lots of sex. "Cure for AIDS" (Work, 1998), from Bern's album *Fifty Eggs*, is about a future without AIDS, and its mood is upbeat and optimistic, not to mention explicit and sexual:²⁰

The day they found a cure for AIDS
Everybody took one little pill and was okay
I slept with Cindy and Martha and Sue
I slept with Julie, Melissa and Kate
The day they found a cure

Bern sings about what people might do in a post-AIDS world where having unprotected sex does not mean risking one's life. He suggests that that people will be naked for "three solid weeks" when we find a cure for AIDS, and some passages are even more provocative²¹:

The day they found a cure
For 6 months, no one went to work, they all had orgies
Morning after pills were sold in grocery stores and gas stations

²⁰ For more on Bern's music, see, for example, Wes Orshoski, "Dan Bern's Messenger Debut Marks New Chapter," *Billboard*, 20 October 2001.

²¹ Bern is not afraid to express provocative ideas. Another song from *Fifty Eggs*, "Bright Lights," includes one of Bern's most explicit lyrics: "Strap on your dildo, baby, tonight I feel like getting fucked in the ass."

Bern said that Phil Ochs's song "The War Is Over" inspired him to write "Cure for AIDS."²² Bern saw himself not just as a singer, but also as someone trying to bring about change. He suggested, "I guess if you can imagine something happening, it seems like a way toward that thing happening."²³

One particular theme in Bern's description of the future is noteworthy. He says, "everybody took one little pill and was okay," implying that AIDS affects everyone and that a vaccine would help AIDS become more like other contained diseases. It insinuates that in the present we cannot be sexually promiscuous. He does not say that in the future all gay men and drug users took a pill – "everybody" took this one little pill.²⁴ He reminds his audience of the hatred caused by AIDS when he sings, "the people who had plotted to get rid of all the gays admitted their guilt and everything was fine."

²² Personal communication, 6 May 2004. Ochs felt inspired by Allen Ginsberg's poem "Wichita Vortex Sutra" (1966), so there are a number of fascinating relationships here. Philip Glass composed a piece for solo keyboard entitled "Wichita Vortex Sutra" (1988). For more on Ochs's song, see Phil Ochs, *The War Is Over* (New York: Collier Books, 1968).

²³ Personal communication, 21 April 2004.

²⁴ Should scientists discover an effective HIV vaccine, a public debate regarding the recipients of the vaccine will certainly ensue. The debate that began in 2006 over mandatory human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccinations (especially for girls) will likely set a precedent as both HPV and HIV can be transmitted sexually. See, for example, Jennifer Barrett, "In The News: A New Way To Fight Cancer," *Newsweek*, 19 June 2006; Jane E. Brody, "HPV Vaccine: Few Risks, Many Benefits," *New York Times*, 15 May 2007; Rita Rubin, "Vaccines: Mandate or Choice? That's the Question after Texas Governor Issues Order Requiring HPV Immunization," *USA Today*, 8 February 2007; and Laurie Udesky, "Push to Mandate HPV Vaccine Triggers Backlash in USA," *Lancet*, 24 March 2007.

Musically, “Cure for AIDS” is uncomplicated, consisting of three chords: the tonic, sub-dominant, and dominant. He sings the first fifteen lines to those same three chords in the same order: tonic, sub-dominant, and dominant. The fourth section of the work is only slightly different: dominant, sub-dominant, tonic, dominant, sub-dominant, tonic, dominant. The last section is a return to the first structure. Consequently, the overall form of the piece could be written as A – A1 – A2 – B – A3. To someone interested in elements of musical style, this structure might seem utterly boring. On the other hand, this is another example of a musician employing a familiar musical form and integrating HIV prevention messages.

Since 1996 there have not been any musical responses to HIV/AIDS from the classical/art world that have received nearly as much attention as Corigliano’s Symphony no. 1. While orchestras do not perform the symphony as frequently, more than fifteen years later it is still the most recognized instrumental response to AIDS. However, there have been countless AIDS benefit classical music concerts around the country, and I have personally been involved with a few of them. For example, along with Lisette Kielsen, the artistic director of a local chamber ensemble, I produced a concert that occurred during the week of World AIDS Day in December 2004. The concert brought together a chamber music ensemble, composers, visual artists, local businesses, and numerous volunteers to raise money for our local AIDS Service Organization. We programmed mostly contemporary concert music – responses to HIV/AIDS. I gave the pre-concert lecture and provided commentary between the works on the program. A silent art auction

featuring dozens of artworks produced by local artists – including a “blank canvas” to be painted as an interpretive response to the musical performance – followed the concert.

While the concert went well, I discovered firsthand that producing a concert is not an easy task. Kielsen and I quickly became acquainted with the practical and ethical questions that accompanied such a project. One of the key issues that we discussed concerned how to program the music for the concert. We decided early on that we wanted our concert to feature original AIDS-themed music, and we found three composers who were willing to donate works without commission: Julie Niedziejko Brandenburg (b. 1964), Jens Joneleit (b. 1968), and Dan Maske (b. 1971). We decided to offer advice and possible texts to set, but we knew that we could not tell the composers what to write. Akin to the Red Hot Organization, we decided that we could not censor ideas that the composers wanted to convey. We wanted some control over the evening, so we started the concert with two works that we picked out ourselves – two selections from the *AIDS Quilt Songbook*, Ricky Ian Gordon’s “I Never Knew” and Chris DeBlasio’s “Walt Whitman in 1989” – and the rest of the concert featured original music.

Much like Corigliano’s program notes for Symphony no. 1, my lecture acted as the discursive agent connecting the musical works to AIDS. I talked about how we were following in a long tradition of music meant to raise AIDS awareness, including the annual chamber music concerts on World AIDS Day in New York in the 1990s, entitled “The Benson AIDS Series,” and the chamber music concerts in Greenwich Village in the

mid-1990s put on by a group of musicians who called themselves “Positive Music.”²⁵ To some extent we modeled our concert on the first performance of the *AIDS Quilt Songbook* in New York in the early 1990s. With the exception of the two *AIDS Quilt Songbook* pieces, none of the works in our concert mentioned HIV or AIDS. When I introduced Julie Niedziejko Brandenburg’s “you missed you,” I discussed the important role that women played in our concert and the notion that “AIDS is everybody’s problem.” I discussed the connections between AIDS and earlier plagues, and the relevance of Jens Joneleit’s “The Most Deserted Fields,” on a text from the great fourteenth-century poet, Petrarch, who lived through the most devastating outbreaks of the plague. My comments about Dan Maske’s “And None Leads Out” focused on how his song used a text based on a collection of poems inspired by *The AIDS Quilt Songbook* and how one AIDS benefit concert can inspire another.

We did not encounter the kind of obstacles that Grace Harry and John Carlin had to overcome in making *America Is Dying Slowly*. None of our composers had previously written music that discussed cop killing, “fags,” “bitches,” or “hoes.” Like John Carlin, we were white, middle-class people raising money for AIDS. Most of the people involved in the project, as well as most of the people who attended our event, were white middle-class people who were, in all probability, at relatively low risk for HIV infection. We did not have any problems selling the AIDS-inspired art at the post-concert auction. I

²⁵ See, for example, “AIDS Ensemble Plans a Chamber Concert,” *New York Times*, 9 February 1995.

felt like an AIDS activist – and thrilled to see a community come together. After the concert ended we could only wonder what kind of effect it really had toward our goals. Did we challenge opinions? Were we educating? Were we activists? Were we changing behaviors? Were there behaviors that needed to be changed?

We could not measure exactly what our concert did, but like most musicians who have responded to AIDS, we never identified measurable goals. We believed that music influences how AIDS is lived, so we took action and we came together as a community to share our experience of AIDS, both personal and philosophical. Like Corigliano, TLC, the Red Hot Organization, Bono, Elton John, Liz Phair, Janet Jackson, Bob Rivers, Dan Bern, and countless others, we saw pain and suffering around us and we helped in the best way that we knew how.

Conclusion

I recently received a poster from some musicians who were putting on a music concert of their own in my community, and the top of the poster read: “AIDS Benefit Concert Dedicated to the Victims of the AIDS Epidemic.” I sent back a rather terse e-mail explaining that many people living with HIV/AIDS find the term “victim” demeaning, and I recommended that they revise their posters.²⁶ The person organizing the

²⁶ Two articles from *October* magazine discuss the term “AIDS victim” and the “Denver Principles” – a statement from a group of people living with AIDS that denounced the use of the word “victim”: Max Navarre, “Fighting the Victim Label,” *October* 43 (1987): 143-6; and “PWA Coalition Portfolio,” *October* 43 (1987): 147-68.

concert seemed genuinely grateful that I shared my opinion, and they eventually replaced many of the posters. Although I felt some satisfaction as a proponent of change, I considered how often I still see and hear the word “AIDS victims” in my daily life, and I hoped I did not discourage the concert’s organizer – he had been inspired by stories about HIV-positive children in China and Rwanda who had lost their parents to AIDS. Two of the three works on the program predated AIDS and none of the works were what I would label “musical responses to AIDS,” but they had chosen music that they felt to be appropriate.

On the other hand, I believed that any music with an AIDS context or with AIDS content plays a role in shaping how people understand AIDS and that we should not underestimate the power of music and musicians in shaping ideas about AIDS. I have planned and participated in multiple AIDS rides, AIDS walks, AIDS benefit concerts, and I have served on my state’s HIV prevention planning council. I have seen firsthand how little some people know about AIDS, and in my estimation, music that speaks to people in a familiar musical language, such as Symphony no. 1 and “Waterfalls,” has a much better chance of making a difference than music like Diamanda Galás’s *Plague Mass*, which makes me physically uncomfortable. The members of ACT UP were highly successful in raising AIDS awareness and bringing about change, but their model does not transfer well to music. There are not many audiences who will respond to having HIV prevention shoved in their ears. Music, like “Hello, I Love You (Let’s Get Tested)” and “Cure for AIDS” meets people in a comfortable musical place and challenges them to reconsider their ideas about AIDS. In the end, musicians who participate in AIDS

activism on the local level – through performance, production, composition, etc. – take advantage of the best opportunity to make an impact. Local concerts have a greater chance at making a difference because they create a common space for people to share their ideas with other people in their community.

In 1998 Christopher Small theorized about a practice he called “musicking.” To “music,” according to Small, is “to take part in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composition), or by dancing,”²⁷ and he might have called many of the activities that I have described in this project, “AIDS musicking.” His main idea is that performance is about much more than the notes on the page, and thus he expands the traditional concept of music as a thing. While this study, like Small’s, has focused on issues related to music, I hope to have shown that music is but one element of a larger cultural response to AIDS. As music scholars, we have a responsibility to look more closely at this particular activity – this “AIDS musicking.” It is powerful and it deserves our attention as music scholars, as cultural critics, as AIDS activists, and as citizens.

²⁷ Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 9. For another kind of musicking, see Matthew Tift, “Grateful Dead Musicking,” in *All Graceful Instruments: The Contexts of the Grateful Dead Phenomenon*, ed. Nicholas G. Meriwether (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2007).

APPENDIX A:
Top Twenty Most Frequently Performed Works by American Composers between 1
March 1988 and 15 May 2009 (Source: American Symphony Orchestra League)

Composer	Work	Scheduled Performances
Barber, Samuel	Concerto, Violin and Orchestra, Op. 14	443
Stravinsky, Igor	Firebird: Suite (1919 Revision)	306
Copland, Aaron	Symphony no. 3	275
Barber, Samuel	Adagio for Strings	251
Stravinsky, Igor	Pétrouchka (1947 Revision)	249
Gershwin, George	Concerto in F Major for Piano	226
Stravinsky, Igor	Sacre du Printemps (1947 Revision)	222
Bernstein, Leonard	Serenade for Violin and String Orchestra	220
Gershwin, George	American in Paris	211
Gershwin, George	Rhapsody in Blue	209
Korngold, Erich	Concerto, Violin & Orchestra, D Major, Op. 35	188
Stravinsky, Igor	Concerto in D Major for Violin	187
Copland, Aaron	Concerto, Clarinet and Orchestra	183
Stravinsky, Igor	Pulcinella: Suite	180
Bernstein, Leonard	Candide: Overture	162
Copland, Aaron	Fanfare for the Common Man	159
Copland, Aaron	Salon México	159
Barber, Samuel	Overture to the School for Scandal	158
Stravinsky, Igor	Pétrouchka (1911 Original)	152
Adams, John	Chairman Dances: Foxtrot for Orchestra	151
—	—	—
Corigliano, John	Symphony no. 1	117

APPENDIX B:
Performance History of Symphony No. 1 among the 125 Orchestras in the United States with the Largest Budgets (Source: American Symphony Orchestra League)

Date	Orchestra	Conductor
1.18.1990	Chicago Symphony Orchestra	Solti
1.19.1990	Chicago Symphony Orchestra	Solti
1.20.1990	Chicago Symphony Orchestra	Solti
1.30.1990	Chicago Symphony Orchestra	Solti
10.24.1991	Louisville Orchestra	Smith
10.25.1991	Louisville Orchestra	Smith
10.26.1991	Louisville Orchestra	Smith
12.12.1991	San Francisco Symphony	Blomstedt
12.13.1991	San Francisco Symphony	Blomstedt
12.14.1991	San Francisco Symphony	Blomstedt
1.9.1992	New York Philharmonic	Slatkin
1.10.1992	New York Philharmonic	Slatkin
1.11.1992	New York Philharmonic	Slatkin
1.14.1992	New York Philharmonic	Slatkin
3.6.1992	Kansas City Symphony	McGlaughlin
3.7.1992	Kansas City Symphony	McGlaughlin
3.8.1992	Kansas City Symphony	McGlaughlin
3.19.1992	Chicago Symphony Orchestra	Barenboim
3.20.1992	Chicago Symphony Orchestra	Barenboim
3.21.1992	Chicago Symphony Orchestra	Barenboim
5.1.1992	Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra	Lopez-Cobos
5.2.1992	Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra	Lopez-Cobos
10.13.1992	Florida Philharmonic Orchestra	Judd
10.14.1992	Florida Philharmonic Orchestra	Judd
10.15.1992	Florida Philharmonic Orchestra	Judd
10.16.1992	Florida Philharmonic Orchestra	Judd
10.19.1992	Florida Philharmonic Orchestra	Judd
1.6.1993	Minnesota Orchestra	Waart
1.7.1993	Minnesota Orchestra	Waart
1.7.1993	Los Angeles Philharmonic	Zinman
1.8.1993	Minnesota Orchestra	Waart
1.8.1993	Grand Rapids Symphony	Comet
1.9.1993	Minnesota Orchestra	Waart
1.9.1993	Los Angeles Philharmonic	Zinman
1.9.1993	Grand Rapids Symphony	Comet

3.25.1993	Boston Symphony Orchestra	Slatkin
3.26.1993	Boston Symphony Orchestra	Slatkin
3.27.1993	Boston Symphony Orchestra	Slatkin
3.30.1993	Boston Symphony Orchestra	Slatkin
4.2.1993	Sacramento Symphony Orchestra	Neale
4.3.1993	Sacramento Symphony Orchestra	Neale
4.4.1993	Sacramento Symphony Orchestra	Neale
11.12.1993	Columbus Symphony Orchestra	Schram
11.13.1993	Columbus Symphony Orchestra	Schram
2.11.1994	Kansas City Symphony	McGlaughlin
2.12.1994	Kansas City Symphony	McGlaughlin
2.13.1994	Kansas City Symphony	McGlaughlin
4.7.1994	San Antonio Symphony	Wilkins
4.8.1994	Savannah Symphony Orchestra	Alsop
4.9.1994	San Antonio Symphony	Wilkins
4.9.1994	Savannah Symphony Orchestra	Alsop
4.10.1994	Savannah Symphony Orchestra	Alsop
4.17.1994	Long Island Philharmonic	Alsop
4.21.1994	Baltimore Symphony Orchestra	Zinman
4.22.1994	Baltimore Symphony Orchestra	Zinman
5.5.1994	Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra	Bay
5.7.1994	Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra	Bay
11.30.1994	San Francisco Symphony	Neale
12.1.1994	San Francisco Symphony	Neale
12.2.1994	San Francisco Symphony	Neale
12.3.1994	San Francisco Symphony	Neale
1.7.1995	Houston Symphony	Eschenbach
1.8.1995	Houston Symphony	Eschenbach
1.9.1995	Houston Symphony	Eschenbach
2.9.1995	New Jersey Symphony Orchestra	Macal
2.10.1995	New Jersey Symphony Orchestra	Macal
2.11.1995	New Jersey Symphony Orchestra	Macal
2.12.1995	New Jersey Symphony Orchestra	Macal
2.16.1995	Atlanta Symphony Orchestra	Levi
2.17.1995	Atlanta Symphony Orchestra	Levi
2.18.1995	Atlanta Symphony Orchestra	Levi
3.17.1995	Pittsburgh Symphony	Slatkin
3.18.1995	Pittsburgh Symphony	Slatkin
3.18.1995	Florida Philharmonic Orchestra	Judd
3.19.1995	Pittsburgh Symphony	Slatkin

3.22.1995	Florida Philharmonic Orchestra	Judd
3.23.1995	Florida Philharmonic Orchestra	Judd
3.24.1995	Florida Philharmonic Orchestra	Judd
11.9.1995	National Symphony Orchestra	Slatkin
11.10.1995	National Symphony Orchestra	Slatkin
11.11.1995	National Symphony Orchestra	Slatkin
5.3.1996	Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra	Alsop
5.4.1996	Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra	Alsop
1.23.1997	Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra	Alsop
1.24.1997	Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra	Alsop
1.25.1997	Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra	Alsop
9.23.1997	Florida Philharmonic Orchestra	Judd
9.24.1997	Florida Philharmonic Orchestra	Judd
4.8.1999	Philadelphia Orchestra	Smith
4.9.1999	Philadelphia Orchestra	Smith
4.10.1999	Philadelphia Orchestra	Smith
4.13.1999	Philadelphia Orchestra	Smith
6.10.1999	Toronto Symphony Orchestra	Alsop
6.12.1999	Toronto Symphony Orchestra	Alsop
6.14.1999	Toronto Symphony Orchestra	Alsop
11.20.1999	New Haven Symphony Orchestra	Alsop
11.21.1999	New Haven Symphony Orchestra	Alsop
3.31.2000	Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra	Leon
4.1.2000	Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra	Leon
12.14.2000	Tucson Symphony Orchestra	Hanson
12.15.2000	Tucson Symphony Orchestra	Hanson
4.19.2001	Utah Symphony & Opera	Lockhart
4.20.2001	Utah Symphony & Opera	Lockhart
4.21.2001	Utah Symphony & Opera	Lockhart
3.1.2002	Syracuse Symphony Orchestra	Hege
3.2.2002	Syracuse Symphony Orchestra	Hege
11.7.2002	Philadelphia Orchestra	Dutoit
11.8.2002	Philadelphia Orchestra	Dutoit
11.9.2002	Philadelphia Orchestra	Dutoit
2.17.2004	Orchestre Symphonique de	Lacombe
2.18.2004	Orchestre Symphonique de	Lacombe
2.19.2004	Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra	Gittleman
2.21.2004	Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra	Gittleman
10.6.2005	National Symphony Orchestra	Slatkin
2.4.2006	Midland Symphony Orchestra	Woods

APPENDIX C: An AIDS Timeline

- 5 June 1981** U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention publishes the first report of AIDS (in *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*)
- 2 October 1985** Rock Hudson dies of AIDS
- 1 April 1987** President Ronald Reagan gives his first speech about the AIDS epidemic
- 11 October 1987** NAMES Project displays the AIDS Quilt on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. for the first time
- November 1987** Randy Shilts publishes *And the Band Played on*
- 1 January 1989** Susan Sontag publishes *AIDS and Its Metaphors*
- 8 April 1990** Ryan White dies at age 18 after fighting AIDS-related lung infection
- 26 July 1990** President George H. W. Bush signs the Americans with Disabilities Act
- 20 February 1991** Chicago Symphony Orchestra premieres John Corigliano's Symphony no. 1
- 8 November 1991** Basketball player Magic Johnson announces that he is HIV-positive
- 19 November 1991** U2 releases "One" on their album *Achtung Baby*
- 24 November 1991** Freddie Mercury, lead singer of Queen, dies from AIDS
- 8 April 1992** Tennis player Arthur Ashe announces that he has AIDS
- 4 June 1992** Alice Tully Hall in Manhattan's Lincoln Center hosts the premiere of William Parker's *AIDS Quilt Songbook*
- 26 June 1992** Elton John releases "The Last Song" on his album *The One*
- 9 November 1992** Elton John establishes the Elton John AIDS Foundation (EJAF)
- 21 December 1992** Sports Illustrated names Arthur Ashe "Sportsman of the Year"

- 6 February 1993** Arthur Ashe dies of AIDS-Related Pneumonia
- 7 May 1993** FDA approves the Reality Female Condom, which offers STD protection for women without relying on the cooperation of their partner
- 11 September 1993** John Greyson releases his movie *Zero Patience*
- 23 December 1993** Jonathan Demme releases *Philadelphia*
- 17 February 1994** Randy Shilts, author of the book *And the Band Played On*, dies of AIDS
- 15 November 1994** TLC releases “Waterfalls” on their album *CrazySexyCool*
- 24 February 1995** In an interview with Barbara Walters, Olympic diver Greg Louganis announces that he has AIDS
- 26 March 1995** Eazy-E (Eric Wright) dies of AIDS at age 31
- 25 June 1996** Red Hot Organization releases *America Is Dying Slowly*
- 10 November 1996** *New York Times Magazine* publishes Andrew Sullivan’s “When Plagues End”
- 30 December 1996** *Time* magazine names AIDS researcher Dr. David Ho “Man of the Year”
- 19 September 1997** The CDC reports that 1996 marked the first calendar year during which AIDS incidence in the United States did not increase
- 7 October 1997** Janet Jackson releases “Together Again” on her album *The Velvet Rope*
- 11 August 1998** Liz Phair releases “Ride” on her album *Whitechocolatespaceegg*

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