

# GRAB MUSIC



## Q-Music: 2023 LGBTQ+ History Month playlist

By Gregg Shapiro

At just 22 years old, **Joanna Sternberg** is an old soul. Most of the songs on their new album “I’ve Got Me” (Fat Possum), come from a

bare-bones folk tradition, performed by Sternberg on guitar, piano and keys, violin, and bass. The lyrics, sung in Sternberg’s distinctive vocal

style, alternate between introspection (the title tune, “Mountains High,” “Drifting On A Cloud”), yearning (“I Will Be With You,” “I’ll Make You Mine,” “The Human Magnet Song”), and brutal honesty (“Stockholm Syndrome,” and the rocking “People Are Toys to You”). The vocals and simple, yet meaningful, lyrics also sound like they owe a debt to early Carole King. This

is especially true on the piano and vocal numbers, including “She Dreams.” [Joanna Sternberg performs on December 3 in Chicago at Thalia Hall.]

**Worriers’** queer lead vocalist Lauren Denitzio uses they/them pronouns, but that’s not the only reason to listen to the band’s new studio album “Trust Your Gut” (Ernest Jennings Record Co.). Arriving just a few months after the intimate “Warm Blanket” (on red vinyl!), “Trust Your Gut” (on black vinyl) has a fuller sound with Denitzio being backed by a band. Worriers covers a full range of emotions on the songs “Hold My Breath,” “I’m Not Mad,” “Waste of Space,” “Backyard Garden,” “Anything Else,” and “Losing the Thread.” The rocking title cut has hit single written all over it and deserves to be heard by everyone.

**Nora Kelly Band** is easily the coolest, queer, Canadian, country band since k.d. lang and the Reclines first appeared on the scene



almost 40(!) years ago. Rodeo Clown (Mint Records), on tasty brown vinyl, honors the country tradition over the course of 10 original tunes. Talk about torch and twang! The all-queer band knows its way around pedal steel, fiddles, banjos, guitars, and keyboards. Kelly's strong vocals give songs such as "Lay Down Girl," "MMM Delicious," "Purgatory Motel," "Catch A Bone," "Roswell," and the title cut the country kick they need, boots and all.

In a perfect and more accepting world, "Out Here Now" ([evermorenest.com](http://evermorenest.com)), the second album by queer Americana act **Ever More Nest** (aka Kelcy Mae Wilburn), would be embraced by music lovers from all walks of life. The songs are as accessible as anything you'd hear on albums by non-queer musical acts from Austin to Nashville and beyond, as well as those on records by Brandy Clark or Brandi Carlile. In other words, there's so much to like about "Out Here Now," including the title track, "What's Gone Is Gone," "Out Loud," "Wishing Well," "My Story" (check out Fat Kaplin's fiddle work), "All I Want," and "Almost Home."

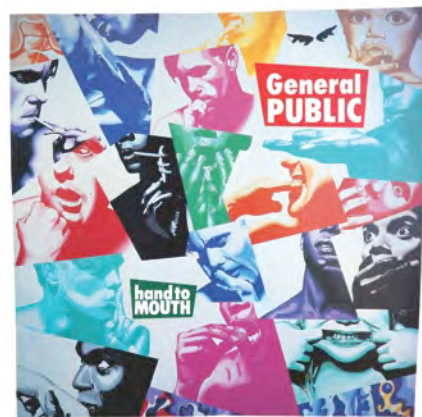
After his most daring (and possibly best) album, 2019's "Territories," prolific gay singer/songwriter **Tom Goss** returns with the bouncy and infectious pop album "Remember What It Feels Like" ([tomgossmusic.com](http://tomgossmusic.com)). The more traditional tunes range from dance-floor ready cuts including "Everything," "Literally," and "Undercover Summer," bubblegum numbers "Enemy of Good," "Don't Wanna," "First Date," and "Break Your Heart." Ballads including "Something Beautiful" and "Fall Before You Fly," are examples of his versatility. Goss, who is known for being generous with his fans, packing recent recordings with more than a dozen songs, doesn't skimp on "Remember What It Feels Like," with its 15 tracks.

Some LGBTQ+ folks of a certain age are sure to remember the UK sextet **General Public**, and its 1984 IRS Records debut album "All The Rage" (BMG), newly reissued on vinyl for the first time since it was first released. Gay men, especially, will probably recall the band's hot front-men Dave Wakeling (who came out as bi in the 1980s) and the late Ranking Roger (who passed in 2019). The pair had previously been

founding members of the groundbreaking ska band The English Beat before departing and forming General Public. "All The Rage" incorporates both the ska influence of early English Beat songs, as well as the more pop and dance-oriented material of the English Beat's final recording "Special Beat Service" (from 1982). The most popular hits from "All The Rage," including "Tenderness," "Never You Done That," and "Hot You're Cool" leaned towards the pop and dance aspect. General Public's second album, "Hand To Mouth" (BMG) from 1984, also reissued on vinyl, didn't fare as well as its predecessor. [Wakeling, and his other band English Beat, perform on December 3 and 4 in Chicago at City Winery.]

Could singer/songwriter **Rachael Sage** be the bi Taylor Swift? Prolific, independent, eternally struggling with love, and empress of her own musical empire, Sage beat Swift to the rerecording punch by a few years when she revisited two of her previously released albums. For the ambitious double disc "The Other Side" (MPress), Sage chose to include a second album of "alternate mixes." Sage, who plays keyboards and guitar, once again delivers a set of pleasing pop songs including "Flowers For Free," "The Place of Fun," "Albatross," "Butterflies at Night," "I Made A Case" (which appears in two versions, including a duet with Howard Jones), and "No Regrets" (co-written with her father Stuart Weitzman). Sage's well-chosen covers include queer singer/songwriter Maria McKee's "Breathe," Yaz's "Only You," and "Forgive Me This," an obscure Europop song.

On her new eponymous black vinyl Mack Avenue album, queer vocalist (and songwriter) **Veronica Swift**, who clearly has talent to burn, goes where few other artists in the jazz vocals genre would dare to tread. By performing daring jazz-influenced covers of songs by Nine Inch Nails ("Closer") and Queen ("The Show Must Go On" and "Keep Yourself Alive"), she sets out to broaden listeners' horizons, and she succeeds. Swift's reading of Jerry Herman's "La Cage Aux Folles" anthem "I Am What I Am" swings as



it never has before. She also has a flair for the dramatic which comes through on her rendition of the lovely standard "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows" and her near-operatic take on Jobim's "Chega de Saudade." Originals such as "Severed Heads" (adapted from a Puccini opera) and "In the Moonlight" (adapted from a Beethoven piano sonata) further demonstrate what Swift is capable of as a lyricist and performer.

Directed by Martin Scorsese, the 1977 drama "New York, New York," starring Liza Minnelli and Robert DeNiro, was more of a movie with musical numbers than a movie musical. Considered a commercial and critical failure, especially coming as it did right after 1976's Oscar-nominated "Taxi Driver," "New York, New York" is probably best known for its theme song, both Liza's version and the one that Frank Sinatra turned into one of his signature tunes. The movie featured a few standards, alongside original tunes by the Tony Award-winning duo of gay John Kander and his writing partner, the late Fred Ebb. In 2023, a stage musical adaptation of "New York, New York," opened on Broadway, featuring the titular song, as well as "But The World Goes 'Round" and "Happy Endings" (from the movie). You can hear those songs, as well as several new Kander & Ebb compositions (along with lyric contributions by the ubiquitous Lin-Manuel Miranda) on the double disc **"New York, New York: Original Broadway Cast Recording"** ([newyorknewyorkbroadway.com](http://newyorknewyorkbroadway.com)).