

# Queer Ancestors - A Pride Month Broadcast

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## Instrumental Intro

Welcome to “ Queer Ancestors” a Pride Month 2020 Broadcast. I’m Cat Woywod and we’re going to listen to German and American Cabaret and Blue Music of the 1920s - 1930s beginning with:

**“Das Lila Lied” sung by Marek Weber**

LYRICS:      Was will man nur?  
                  Ist das Kultur,

daß jeder Mensch verpönt ist,  
 der klug und gut,  
 jedoch mit Blut  
 von eig'ner Art durchströmt ist,  
 daß g'rade die  
 Kategorie  
 vor dem Gesetz verbannt ist,  
 die im Gefühl  
 bei Lust und Spiel  
 und in der Art verwandt ist?  
 Und dennoch sind die Meisten stolz,  
 daß sie von ander'm Holz!

Refrain      Wir sind nun einmal anders als die Andern,  
 die nur im Gleichschritt der Moral geliebt,  
 neugierig erst durch tausend Wunder wandern,  
 und für die's doch nur das Banale gibt.  
 Wir aber wissen nicht, wie das Gefühl ist,  
 denn wir sind alle and'rer Welten Kind,  
 wir lieben nur die lila Nacht, die schwül ist,  
 weil wir ja anders als die Andern sind.

Wozu die Qual,  
 uns die Moral  
 der Andern aufzudrängen?  
 Wir, hört geschwind,  
 sind wie wir sind,  
 selbst wollte man uns hängen.  
 Wer aber denkt,  
 daß man uns hängt,  
 den müßte man beweinen,  
 doch bald, gebt acht,  
 wird über Nacht  
 auch uns're Sonne scheinen.

Dann haben wir das gleiche Recht erstritten,  
 wir leiden nicht mehr, sondern sind gelitten!

“Das Lila Lied” or “The Lavender Song” is one of the first queer anthems and was written after the Institute for Sexual Science under Magnus Hirschfeld in Berlin published its "First International Conference for Sexual Reform" which called for regulations on sexual behaviour to be based on science instead of religion or other unscientific tradition one year after being founded in 1919.

Missing from this recording are the two additional lyric verses which I highly recommend to either read or listen to in contemporary interpretations of the song. The interpretation we listened to was sung by Marek Weber in 1920. Shortly after its publishing and success, the song was rewritten into a heterosexual version called "Sei meine Frau auf vierundzwanzig Stunden".

Now, crossing the Atlantic, I would love to introduce you to the female blues singers of the Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem Renaissance in New York brought forth many great artists for example Bessie Smith, the "Empress of the Blues".

### **"Taint no body's Bizness if I do" - Bessie Smith**

LYRICS:       There ain't nothing I can do, or nothing I can say  
                   That folks don't criticize me  
                   But I'm goin' to do just as I want to anyway  
                   And don't care if they all despise me

If I should take a notion  
 To jump into the ocean  
 'Tain't nobody's bizness if I do, do, do do

If I go to church on Sunday  
 Then just shimmy down on Monday  
 Ain't nobody's bizness if I do, if I do

If my friend ain't got no money  
 And I say "Take all mine, honey"  
 'Tain't nobody's bizness if I do, do, do do

If I give him my last nickel  
 And it leaves me in a pickle  
 'Tain't nobody's bizness if I do, if I do

Well I'd rather my man would hit me  
 Than to jump right up and quit me  
 'Tain't nobody's bizness if I do, do, do do

I swear I won't call no copper  
 If I'm beat up by my papa  
 'Tain't nobody's bizness if I do, if I do

"Tain't Nobody's Bizness if I Do" was one of the first Blues standards which was and has been interpreted by many artists. Fittingly, the attitude of the song reflects

Bessie Smith's advocacy for a wider vision of African-American womanhood beyond domesticity, and conformity; she sought empowerment and happiness through independence, sassiness, and sexual freedom.

Her expression of that freedom through her music was in contrast to her private life in which her husband beat up her lover Gertrude C. Saunders due to his suspicion of their relationship, resulting in the end of both relationships, even though no divorce ever took place.

In 2015 a TV movie about Bessie Smith, called "Bessie", obscured history by having Bessie's Husband and Gertrude instead engaging in an affair.

The violent realities of being out in the beginning of the last century led many queer musicians to conceal their truths in their lyrics. "Prove it on me" embodies that reality beautifully:

### **"Prove it on me" - Ma Rainey**

LYRICS:      Went out last night, had a great big fight  
Everything seemed to go on wrong  
I looked up, to my surprise  
The gal I was with was gone.

Where she went, I don't know  
I mean to follow everywhere she goes;  
Folks say I'm crooked. I didn't know where she took it  
I want the whole world to know.

They say I do it, ain't nobody caught me  
Sure got to prove it on me;  
Went out last night with a crowd of my friends,  
They must've been women, 'cause I don't like no men.

It's true I wear a collar and a tie,  
Makes the wind blow all the while  
Don't you say I do it, ain't nobody caught me  
You sure got to prove it on me.

Say I do it, ain't nobody caught me  
Sure got to prove it on me.

I went out last night with a crowd of my friends,  
It must've been women, 'cause I don't like no men.  
Wear my clothes just like a fan  
Talk to the gals just like any old man

Cause they say I do it, ain't nobody caught me  
 Sure got to prove it on me.

That was “Prove it on me” by Ma Rainey whom was born in 1882 in Columbus, Georgia in the U.S. Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith were colleagues during the 1920s - 1930s at the height of female blues music. Besides their profession they shared experiences of the intersections of being queer women of colour.

According to the website queerculturalcenter.org, the lyrics refer to an incident in 1925 in which Rainey was "arrested for taking part in an orgy at [her] home involving women in her chorus."<sup>[24]</sup> The political activist and scholar Angela Davis noted that "'Prove It on Me' was a cultural forerunner to the lesbian cultural movement of the 1970s, which began to crystallize around the performance and recording of lesbian-affirming songs.

With an affirming attitude the next artists performed in a white tuxedo and a white top hat while sometimes performing backed up by drag queens: “Worried Blues”

### “Worried Blues”- Gladys Bentley

LYRICS: What makes you men for treat us women like you do  
 What makes you men for treat us women like you do  
 I don't want no man that I got to give my money to

Don't be a letter, never nothing but a note  
 Don't be a letter, if it's nothing but a note  
 Wrote back and told him "Man I ain't a billy goat"

Give my man everything from a diamond ring on down  
 Give my man everything from a diamond ring on down  
 Next thing I'm gonna give him, six feet in the cold cold ground

You can never tell, what a old old man can do  
 Hard to tell, what a old old man can do  
 Keep your eyes open girls, 'cause he'll put that thing on you

'Cause you ain't even got up papa, ain't no signal that you can be had  
 'Cause you ain't even got up papa, ain't no signal that you can be had  
 If I put this thing on you baby, gonna be just too doggone bad

Mighty hard for you women to keep a real good man nowadays  
 Mighty hard for you women to keep a real good man nowadays  
 Ain't little chippy gal got so many doggone different ways

Ain't no hard \_\_\_ mop for you than the good Lord ever done

Didn't mop for you than the good Lord ever done  
Put clothes on your back, you know darn well you wasn't born with now

Gladys Bentley became famous for performing in drag, singing and playing the piano at clubs like “The Clam House” in New York. Rather overtly queer for the times she lived in, her visibility gave her fame and fortune but also caused her much trouble. “Worried Blues” was recorded in 1928, in 1931 she had a public marriage to a unidentified woman and “The Clam House” became famous due to her performances. Shortly after the owners sued her to prohibit her from moving her career to Broadway out of their own financial interests.

Despite the legal issues she pursued performing on Broadway, only to have the police shut down her shows due to the nature of her lyrics and performances. The policing and harassment of her person increased in the late 1930's and 1940s, with her needing licensed permission to wear men's clothing. While her career was also fading, she married a man after 5 months of meeting him and him denying that they were married, started wearing feminine clothes and claimed that taking female hormones “cured” her. Before her death at the age of 53 in 1960 she had been more involved in the church and had just been ordained as a minister despite never having official papers.

Gladys Bentley's Legacy thou is one that cannot be overlooked.

She was revolutionary in the expression of her gender and sexuality. Gladys Bentley did not try to “pass” as a man, nor did she playfully try to deceive her audience into believing she was. Instead, she expressed a black female masculinity that blurred the distinctions between black and white, masculine and feminine.

### “Somebody Else Will Take Your Place” - Alberta Hunter

LYRICS: I've cried both night and day  
You've always had your way  
But now you're leavin'  
You're goin' away today  
What grieves my weary mind  
I've been so good and kind  
If you had to leave me  
Why did you wait 'til today?

When you're leavin' me, pretty baby  
Someone else will take your place  
For many years, I've longed and waited  
To say these words with so much grace  
Don't waste them like a millionaire  
Lord, they do declare  
With my dainty figure and my baby stare

So if you're leavin' me, pretty baby  
Someone else will take your place

I said, you're leavin' me, pretty baby  
Someone else will take your place  
For many years I've longed and waited  
To say these words with so much grace  
Now if you didn't want me, tell me to my face  
'Cause there's five or six waitin', Lord, to take your place  
If you're dissatisfied and feel like leavin'  
Someone else will take your place

Hit that thing, big boy!

When you're leavin' me, pretty baby  
Someone else will take your place  
For many years I've longed and waited  
To say these words with so much grace  
Don't ever think you are in so strong  
The chances are you might be wrong  
So if you're dissatisfied and feel like leavin'  
Someone else will take your place

Another important singer of the female blues era was Alberta Hunter. There is a lovely recording online of her also singing the blues standard "Taint no body's bizness if I do" that we listened to earlier by Bessie Smith, also recorded around 1923.

Alberta Hunter kept her sexuality hidden, so that she could share her live with Lottie Tyler, whom she met in Chicago in 1927. Just one lyric verse of the song we listened to hints at her orientation, similarly concealed like many queer artists would of that time.

Alberta Hunter's career took off after years of working day jobs and performing at night, until her persistence payed off with many performances in USA and Europe following. Being one of the leading figures of the 1920s and 1930s female blues genre she performed with musicians like Louis Armstrong, whom also played with Ma Rainey. While both female blues singers are unknown today, his name is still well known.

After Alberta Hunters mothers passed away in 1957 she retired her musical career to work as a nurse for 20 years until she eventually returned to performing from 1977 on until her death in 1984.

Instrumental music

Now following Alberta Hunters trips to Europe our journey takes us to Berlin of the 1920s. The Cabaret scene is booming, queer subculture is thriving and well in Germany's capital city.

Without needing much of an introduction herself, Marlene Dietrich, Margo Lion and Oskar Karlweiss gifted us with this polyamorous song in 1928:

**-“Wenn die Beste Freundin” - Marlene Dietrich, Margo Lion, Oskar Karlweiss**

**LYRICS:**

Duett: Wenn die beste Freundin  
 Mit der besten Freundin  
 Um was einzukaufen,  
 Um was einzukaufen,  
 Um sich auszulaufen,  
 Durch die Straßen latschen,  
 Um sich auszuquatschen,  
 Spricht die beste Freundin  
 Zu der besten Freundin:  
 Meine beste, meine beste Freundin!

Oh meine beste Freundin!  
 Oh meine schöne Freundin!  
 Oh meine treue Freundin!  
 Oh meine süße Freundin!  
 Geht die beste Freundin  
 Mit der besten Freundin,  
 Spricht die beste Freundin  
 Zu der besten Freundin,  
 Meine beste, meine beste Freundin!

Gesprochen: 1. Freundin: Ja, was sagt denn da die beste Freundin? Sag doch mal was zu mir, was Dir so gerade einfällt

2. Freundin: Ich kann Dir nur eins sagen: Wenn ich Dich nicht hätte...  
 Wir vertragen uns beide so gut.

1. Freundin: Ja, wir vertragen uns so furchtbar gut. Wie wir uns beide gut zusammen vertragen.

2. Freundin: Das ist kaum noch auszuhalten, wie gut wir uns beide vertragen.

1. Freundin: Nur mit Einem vertrage ich mich noch so gut. Mit meinem süßen kleinen Mann.

2. Freundin: Ja, mit Deinem süßen kleinen Mann.



Duett: Ja, mein Mann, ist ein Mann!  
 So ein Mann wie mein Mann!  
 Wie der Mann von der Frau,  
 Wie der Mann von der Frau!  
 Früher gab's den Hausfreund,  
 doch der schwand dahin!  
 Heute statt des Hausfreunds  
 Gibt's die Hausfreundin!

Gesprochen: 2. Freundin: Dein kleiner Mann ist aber auch zu süß.

1. Freundin: So?

2. Freundin: Ja

1. Freundin: Warum?

2. Freundin: Ich finde...

1. Freundin: Wieso?

2. Freundin: Warum?

1. Freundin: Wieso findest Du?

2. Freundin: Er macht solche Sachen ...

1. Freundin: Das paßt mir aber nicht.

2. Freundin: Hallooo

Ehemann: Nanu?

1. Freundin: Du hast mich mit ihr betrogen.

Ehemann: Weil Du mich mit ihr betrogen hast.

2. Freundin: Und Du hast mich mit ihm betrogen

1. Freundin: Weil Du mich mit ihm betrügst

Ehemann: Was sind denn das für verwickelte Familienverhältnisse!

Wollen wir uns nicht lieber vertragen?

2. Freundin: Ja, wir woll'n uns lieber vertragen

Ehemann: Die dumme, dumme Liebe.

Ehemann begleitet mit: mmm – da-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta

Duett: Wenn die beste Freundin  
 Mit der besten Freundin  
 Um was einzukaufen,  
 Um was einzukaufen,  
 Um sich auszulaufen,  
 Durch die Straßen latschen,  
 Um sich auszuquetschen,  
 Spricht die beste Freundin  
 Zu der besten Freundin:

Meine beste, meine beste Freundin!  
 Oh meine beste Freundin!  
 Oh meine schöne Freundin!  
 Oh meine treue Freundin!  
 Oh meine süße Freundin!  
 Geht die beste Freundin  
 mit der besten Freundin,  
 Spricht die beste Freundin  
 Zu der besten Freundin,  
 Meine beste, meine beste Freundin!

Originating from the Revue “Es liegt in der Luft” this song suggests that there was not only something in the air but also in the water of 1920s Berlin!  
 Similarly odd, entertaining and a person of her times was the legendary Claire Waldoff:

#### “Lena ach wie ich dich liebe” - Claire Waldoff

LYRICS: (No transcription available)

Born in 1884 as Clara Waldoff in Gelsenkirchen, the wish to pursue her career as an actress drove Claire Waldoff to Berlin in the 1910s where she quickly rose to fame due to her original performance and vocal style and where she met her life long partner Olga von Roeder, whom came from an American - German family. Claire Waldoff's established herself as Berlin's favourite across all social and economic classes and soon traveled across Germany to perform her songs leaving audiences going wild for encores. I like to say that Claire Waldoff was punk before punk even existed

#### -“Hannelore” - Claire Waldoff

LYRICS: Hannelore wohnt am halleschen Tor bei einer Blumenfrau  
 Hannlore singt im Revue im Chor man hört es nicht genau  
 doch wo sie jing und wo sie stand da war'n die Kerl's außer Rand und  
 Band.  
 Besonders so im Mai.  
 und voller Lenz – und Liebesdrang schrieb eener mal uff eene Bank die  
 schöne Melodei:

Hannelore Hannelore schönstes Kind von halleschen Tore  
 süssee reizendes Jeschöpfchen mit dem schönsten Bubiköpfchen  
 keiner unterscheiden kann ob Du Weib bist oder Mann  
 Hannelore Hannelore schönstes Kind vom halleschen Tor

Hannelore jeht uff'n Reimann Ball im hochgeschlossnen Kleid  
 nachher sitzt sie im Ludenstall zu früher Morgenzeit  
 sie tropft in die Augen Atropin und schnupft 'ne Handvoll Kokain  
 besonders so im Mai  
 Sie macht in Weltverjessenheit und ab und zu in Sinnlichkeit  
 ooch det jeht schnell vorbei

Hannelore Hannlore schönstes Kind von halleschen Tore  
 süsches reizendes Jeschöpfchen mit dem schönsten Bubiköpfchen  
 keiner unterscheiden kann ob Du Weib bist oder Mann  
 Hannelore Hannelore schönstes Kind vom halleschen Tor

Hannelore trägt ein Smokingkleid mit einem Bindschlips  
 trägt ein Monokel jederzeit am Band aus Seidenrips  
 Sie boxt sie foxt sie golft sie steppt und unter uns jesacht sie neppt  
 besonders so im Mai  
 Es hat mir einer anvertraut: Sie hat 'n Bräutjam und 'ne Braut  
 doch geht bloß nebenbei

Hannelore Hannelore schönstes Kind vom halleschen Tore  
 süsches reizendes Jeschöpfchen mit dem schönsten Bubiköpfchen  
 keiner unterscheiden kann ob Du Weib bist oder Mann  
 Hannelore Hannelore schönstes Kind vom halleschen Tor

Starting from the early 1930s her performances started getting disrupted by Hitler Youth Groups chanting propaganda. Claire's "pure german " lineage helped her being able to stay in Berlin and not experience violence and her popularity kept her working throughout the following years while still being observed but not persecuted for her direct lyrics or orientation:

### **“Raus mit'n Männern ausm Reichstag” -Claire Waldoff**

LYRICS: Es weht durch die ganze Historie  
 Ein Zug der Emanzipation  
 Vom Menschen bis zur Infusorie  
 Überall will das Weib auf den Thron  
 Von den Amazonen bis zur Berliner Range  
 Braust ein Ruf wie Donnerhall daher  
 „Wat die Männer können, können wir schon lange  
 Und vielleicht 'ne ganze Ecke mehr“

Raus mit'n Männern aus'm Reichstag  
 Und raus mit'n Männern aus'm Landtag

Und raus mit'n Männern aus'm Herrenhaus  
Wir machen draus  
Ein Frauenhaus  
Raus mit'n Männern aus'm Dasein  
Und raus mit'n Männern aus'm Hiersein  
Und raus mit'n Männern aus'm Dortsein  
Sie müssten längst schon fort sein  
Ja, raus mit'n Männern aus'm Bau  
Und rin in die Dinger mit der Frau!

Es liegen in der Wiege und brüllen  
Die zukünft'jen Männer, ganz klein  
Die Amme, die Meisterin im Stillen  
Flößt die Kraft ihnen schluckweise ein  
Von dem vielen Flößen aus Flasche, Brust und Becher  
Ach, wir dummen Frauen sind ja schuld  
Da werden sie immer stärker, da werden sie immer frecher  
Na, uns reißt doch endlich die Geduld

Raus mit'n Männern aus'm Reichstag  
Und raus mit'n Männern aus'm Landtag  
Und raus mit'n Männern aus'm Herrenhaus  
Wir machen draus  
Ein Frauenhaus  
Raus mit'n Männern aus'm Dasein  
Und raus mit'n Männern aus'm Hiersein  
Und raus mit'n Männern aus'm Dortsein  
Sie müssten längst schon fort sein  
Ja, raus mit'n Männern aus'm Bau  
Und rin in die Dinger mit der Frau

Die Männer haben alle Berufe  
Sind Schutzmann und sind Philosoph  
Sie klettern von Stufe zu Stufe  
In der Küche stehen wir und sind doof  
Sie bekommen Orden, wir bekommen Schwielen  
Liebe Kinder, es ist eine Schmach!  
Ja, sie trauen sich, ja, die Politik zu spielen  
Aber, na, sie ist ja auch danach

Raus mit'n Männern aus'm Reichstag  
Und raus mit'n Männern aus'm Landtag

Und raus mit'n Männern aus'm Herrenhaus  
 Wir machen draus  
 Ein Frauenhaus  
 Raus mit'n Männern aus'm Dasein  
 Und raus mit'n Männern aus'm Hiersein  
 Und raus mit'n Männern aus'm Dortsein  
 Sie müssten längst schon fort sein  
 Ja, raus mit'n Männern aus'm Bau  
 Und rin in die Dinger mit der Frau

In 1939 she and her partner moved to a secluded city in Bavaria at the Austrian border where they lived for the rest of their lives. She only returned to the destroyed Berlin once after the second world war was over. The currency reform of 1948 made her poor but still being Berlin's sweetheart she was granted a small pension. She published her Autobiografie "Weeste noch" in 1953 and died in 1957 at the age of 72.

### **"Wenn du einmal dein Herz Verschenkst" Lotte Lehmann**

LYRICS: Alle Maenner sehn dich an,  
 alle Maenner flehn dich an,  
 doch keiner hat bis jetzt ein Recht auf dich.  
 Aber ich Weiss ganz genau:  
 Einmal liebt doch jede Frau.  
 Naht deine schwache Stunde denk an mich

Refrain: Wenn du einmal dein Herz verschenkst,  
 dann schenk es mir!  
 Und wenn du mal ans Kuessen denkst,  
 dann komm 'zu mir!  
 Mein Liebling erwarte dich vor meiner Tuer.  
 Und ist mein Zimmer noch so klein,  
 es reicht bestimmt zum Gluecklich sein!  
 Drum wenn du mal dein Herz verschenkst,  
 dann schenk es bitte mir!

Wenn du einen Blick verschenkst  
 'mal ein Stueckchen Glueck verschenkst  
 ich schwore dir dass mich dass nicht geniert!  
 Eine Frau schenkt mancherlei  
 doch ich finde nichts dabei,  
 nur eines halt mir bitte reserviert!

Lotte Lehmann was born in 1888 in Perleberg in the Province of Brandenburg of former Prussia. She was a famous soprano singer whose performances are considered among the best ever recorded in the world of classical German songs of the 14th and 15th century.

Her career took place in Austria and after 1930 seasonally in the United States, to where she ultimately emigrated after 1938, also performing several times in South America. She retired in 1951 from performing and instead taught at several different institutions.

From 1976 to her death on Lehmann shared her life with Frances Holden, a psychologist who specialised in the study of classical music genius.

I want to end this broadcast with a song by a person who bridged many borders: Josefina Baker. Born in 1906 in Missouri, USA, with a life and career in Europe and America, she also had her start during the Harlem Renaissance of New York. Starting out as a dancer for revue's and vaudeville shows she soon immigrated to Paris in the early 1920s, as one of the first coloured Americans to do so, where she ultimately rose to fame due to her unique, erotic and humorous style of performance. She tried to return to the USA but was never as well received there as in France.

One of her marriages was to a French industrialist and became a French citizen in 1937, but she had many queer affairs - with blues singer Clara Smith, painter Frida Kahlo or writer Colette – which were kept secret but became public after the fact.

During WW2 she used her high society social circles to collect information of military officials, sneaking messages over borders across Europe and internationally, written in invisible ink on music sheets or in her underwear. For her services she received a military decoration after the Second World War for helping the Anti-Fascist Resistance.

She turned the attention and recognition of her success towards addressing other serious subject matter through her artistry. Following an invitation for performing in Miami USA, she won a battle over desegregating the attending audience and followed that sold-out performance up by a national tour which was equally welcomed.

Few years later, her outspokenness about the segregation in America caused her trouble which resulted in the termination of her work visa and it should take a decade before she was allowed to perform in the USA again.

After working with and for the Civil Rights Movement throughout the 1950s and 60s, she was approached by Martin Luther King Jr. Widow, Coretta Scott King, if she would be willing to take his place as a leader for the movement. She declined that offer in favour of the 12 Children she had adopted during the time she had worked with the Civil Rights Movement. She had formed a family which she had called "The

Rainbow Tribe”, Children of many different backgrounds and ethnicity, living her vision of inclusivity and diversity.

The following song is called “Always” from 1925;

May her Vision live on, Always

**“Always” - Josefine Baker**

LYRICS: Everything went wrong,  
And the whole day long  
I'd feel so blue.  
For the longest while  
I'd forget to smile,  
Then I met you.  
Now that my blue days have passed,  
Now that I've found you at last -

I'll be lovin' you, always  
With a love that's true, always  
When the things you've planned need a helpin' hand  
I will understand always, always

Days may not be fair, always  
That's when I'll be there, always  
Not for just an hour, not for just a day  
Not for just a year, but always

Days may not be fair, always  
That's when I'll be there, always  
Not for just an hour, not just a day  
Not for just one year but always  
Always  
Always  
All the time

Songs were remastered as well the Broadcast produced, recorded, moderated by Cat Woywod, 2020 in Kassel.

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Special Thanks to: FREIES RADIO KASSEL  
CAMPUS RADIO KASSEL  
R:EIN RADIO / RADIO RASCLAT KASSEL  
LSKH FRANKFURT