

Social and Cultural Attitudes towards LGBTQ+ in Britain from the 1950s

Information sheet 2: LGBTQ+ Representation in Music (1950s–1980s)

The 1950s & 1960s

Attitudes towards LGBTQ+ in music reflected wider attitudes of the time but were also influenced by growing cultural rebellion. Homosexuality was illegal until 1967, but music was a subtle way for artists to express identity, challenge norms, and create spaces for LGBTQ+ people. Below are a few examples:

- **Brian Epstein** was a gay man in a time of legal persecution. Nevertheless, he defied attitudes by managing The Beatles and changing pop culture. The band's success helped make music more accessible across social backgrounds and encouraged youth-led cultural change.
- Many songs contained coded references to same-sex attraction or queer identity, but artists had to be careful due to legal and social risks.
- **Johnny Mathis**, a popular singer, didn't hide his sexuality but didn't publicly come out until much later, for fear of a backlash.
- **Little Richard** was known for his flamboyant style, blurring gender boundaries. He refused to conform and inspired future queer artists. (He is now a preacher in the USA!)



The 1970s & 1980s

David Bowie's androgynous image and theatrical performances challenged gender norms, inspiring people to embrace individuality. His personas, such as Ziggy Stardust, encouraged self-reinvention, showing that identity could be fluid rather than fixed.

Disco music became a safe space for LGBTQ+ people, with artists like Sylvester openly embracing queer identity in their performances.

Gay clubs and underground music scenes flourished, providing spaces where LGBTQ+ people could express themselves more freely.

Tom Robinson Band's song *Glad to Be Gay* openly protested against police brutality and legal discrimination, bringing LGBTQ+ issues into mainstream music.

Goth and **New Romantic** artists combined music, fashion, and rebellion, to reject toxic masculinity and embrace self-expression. This era encouraged a more fluid approach to gender and identity, reflected in both personal style and music.

The **HIV/AIDS** crisis led to increased homophobia. Many artists faced discrimination or pressure to downplay their identities.

Attitudes of the British press towards HIV/AIDS in the 1980s



The 21st Century

LGBTQ+ identity has evolved from the increased visibility of the late 20th century to full mainstream acceptance and activism.

The **2010s** saw a breakthrough for openly LGBTQ+ artists like **Chappell Roan**, **Olly Alexander**, **Christine and the Queens** and **Sam Smith**, who openly discuss their sexuality and gender identity.

By the **2020s**, non-binary and gender-fluid artists gained recognition, with **Kim Petras** breaking records and challenging traditional gender norms.