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"Every Tool Is a Weapon If You Hold It Right": Curating Feminist and Queer Listening Experiences in the Work of Ani DiFranco

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Abstract

Widely associated with third- and fourth-wave feminism, Ani DiFranco's artistic practice creates and curates queer and feminist musical experiences through the tools of songwriting and spoken-word poetry. Since the release of her eponymous debut album in 1990, DiFranco has carved out a distinctive voice within American folk and popular music and has cultivated communities of affiliation across feminist and queer communities. Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of performativity and David Halperin's conception of queerness as a form of non-normative identity, this article offers close, textual readings of a selection of DiFranco's earlier songs and spoken-word poems, including "The Whole Night", "In or Out", "Lost Woman Song", and "Self Evident". In doing so, the article demonstrates how DiFranco's performances extend beyond musical expression to function as sites of queer and feminist cultural production, where audiences are invited to participate in broader conversations about identity, community, and social change.

Keywords: Ani DiFranco; queer theory; feminism; folk music; gender performativity; queer listening; feminist listening; spoken-word poetry; communities of affiliation

1. Introduction

Ani DiFranco has long occupied a distinctive, unconventional position within American folk music: a third- or fourth-wave feminist singer-songwriter, a spoken-word poet, an author, and a musician who consciously and insistently does not engage with the commercialisation of music-making. Through her engagement with feminist, queer, and intersectional politics, DiFranco has curated queer and feminist musical and artistic experiences through her deeply political but personal performances (Garrett 2008, p. 380). Her recordings and performances align with the underground Riot Grrrl movement of the early 1990s, yet DiFranco occupies a distinctive position within contemporary feminist and queer culture. Although much scholarship on DiFranco has focused on gender and sexuality (see Feigenbaum 2005; Love 2016; Reger 2007), relatively little attention has been paid to how her performances and recordings cultivate communities of affiliation among her listeners. This article addresses that gap by arguing that DiFranco's songs and poetry create feminist and queer listening communities through which audiences negotiate questions of identity, desire, embodiment, bodily autonomy, and political resistance.

Focusing on DiFranco's recordings from the 1990s and early 2000s, this article examines how questions of bisexuality and the boundaries of cisheteronormative monogamy emerge in "The Whole Night" (1991), before contrasting these with the more explicit articulation of same-sex desire in "In or Out" (1992). The ambiguity of sexual identity is a common thread during this period in her work, where she weaves a tapestry of queerness for her

Check for updates

Academic Editor: Ivana Medić

Received: 26 June 2026
Revised: 6 August 2026
Accepted: 7 August 2026
Published: 11 August 2026

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audience. This is complemented by songs such as "Lost Woman Song" (1991) and "Blood in the Boardroom" (1993), which explore abortion and menstruation against the backdrop of a pervasive patriarchy. The overlapping of the political and the personal culminates in the spoken-word poem "Self Evident" (2002), which challenges the political hegemony and militarism of the United States in the aftermath of 11 September 2001. Through close readings of the lyrics and poetry of the above texts, the article demonstrates how DiFranco creates affective communities of affiliation through which listeners negotiate questions of desire, embodiment, autonomy, and political resistance. Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of performativity alongside David Halperin's, Michael Warner's, and Lauren Berlant's conceptions of queerness as anti-normative, the article situates DiFranco within a broader tradition of queer cultural production.

2. Queer as a Tool When You Hold It Right

> For every lie I unlearn
> I learn something new
> I sing sometimes for the war that I fight
> 'cause every tool is a weapon
> If you hold it right (DiFranco 1993)

Campbell et al. (2023) position queer theory in performance studies as something of an "awkward bedfellow", arguing that it can be "annoying at best, and at worst, exclusionary" (p. 4). Rather than undermining its usefulness, however, this tension highlights queer theory's capacity to question the very categories and assumptions that it interrogates. As such, its self-reflexive and anti-normative nature makes it particularly well suited to examining DiFranco's work, which similarly resists fixed identities, stable meanings, and normative expectations. In her 1993 spoken-word poem "My IQ" from her studio album *Puddle Dive*, DiFranco reminds us that every tool can be used as a way to disrupt or deconstruct meaning. Stripping back what can be seen as the inconsistencies and ambiguity of theory can allow us to further explore the art of Ani DiFranco and how she invites dialogue in relation to feminist and queer discourse. This article will offer tools to evaluate, or re-evaluate, the chosen texts as each, in my view, hold a key to understanding how DiFranco curates feminist and queer listening experiences. As Campbell et al. (2023, p. 4) observe, queer theory seeks to "articulate life beyond the cisheteronormative." It is precisely this capacity to interrogate normative assumptions that makes it an appropriate framework for this article. Therefore, the analysis draws primarily on Judith Butler's theory of performativity together with the work of David Halperin, Michael Warner, and Lauren Berlant.

Butler's theory of gender performativity was first brought into queer discourse several decades ago and it remains a useful mode of understanding and analysis. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler doubles down on her theory of performativity, expanding on it in saying that gender is not something that can be "donned . . . for the day" (Butler 1993, x), but that gender is something that is not one particular act, but a reiterated and repeated performance that communicates a cohesion through its frequency. Furthermore, queerness is not positioned as a static identity by Butler, but, instead, she posits that queer identities can be produced, policed, and resisted by regimes of power. Queerness as a response to shame, one which was once pathologised, and is now used to nurture affective and collective communities (Butler 1993, p. 226). Queerness, then, becomes not simply an identity, but a site through which normative culture can be challenged and revisited. The known shift from shame to affiliation is particularly relevant to the poetry and songs of Ani DiFranco, where her songs and poetry bring about personal and political reflections on how queerness is articulated through her work.

https://doi.org/10.3390/arts15080186

Additionally, David Halperin's conception of queerness provides a useful framework through which we can understand the political and cultural interventions that are knitted through DiFranco's musical and poetic discourse. Defining queerness is, as Halperin states, "at odds" with itself, which leads to a multifaceted meaning of what queerness is and what queerness can be (Halperin 1995, p. 62). Queerness, therefore, is not reduced into one singular category, but rather speaks to a transgressive positionality where norms can be resisted and revised. If queer theory is thus a "theoretical and political resistance to normalization," (Halperin 2008, p. 341), I posit that DiFranco's work performs a feminist and queer perspective that resists cisheteronormativity.

DiFranco's work captures and mediates feminist and queer meaning. In *The Spirit of Ani: Reflections on Spirituality, Feminism, Music & Freedom* she describes her songs as: "More like a recognition of interconnectedness, through the songs, or through the energy field that I create when I play or when I step onstage. I have to trust that it is a process that's taking place through both of us that just is, that can't be judged." (DiFranco and Rosen 2026, p. 15). Using the tools above, and holding them right, new readings can help develop an understanding of how artists curate cohesive communities focusing primarily on feminist and queer listeners.

3. Mediating Space Between Art and Artist

> I build each one of my songs
> Out of glass
> So you can see me inside of them
> I suppose
> Or you could just leave the image of me
> In the background, I guess
> And watch your own reflection superimposed (DiFranco 1994)

Through her songwriting and poetry, DiFranco urges her listeners to use her art to approach reflective practice. Seen in the above song "Overlap" from the 1994 album *Out of Range*, DiFranco's main artistic project unfolds: unapologetically personal and intentionally inviting listeners to also be shaped by her craft. Her unique style of playing acoustic guitar has been a marker of her identity as a musician. In her early performances at Manhattan bars, DiFranco developed an aggressive, percussive guitar style, using a slew of alternate tunings and picking to cut through the noise: "To be heard above the din of noisy bars and coffeehouses, I adopted a more rhythmic, chunky, pulling, pushing style" (Garrett 2008, p. 238). In her memoir, *No Walls and the Recurring Dream* (DiFranco 2020), she further explains how she approaches her guitar as a percussive instrument, which allows sound and silence to coexist: "An acoustic guitar's ability to make sound and silence sit right next to each other is at the core of its power," which emphasises the dramatic pauses employed by her in her music (DiFranco 2020, p. 57). She further builds on this, saying that silencing the instrument would draw the audience's attention, creating an opportunity to connect with them directly and further deepen her relationship with her listeners (DiFranco 2020, p. 59). Wood (1996, p. 164) similarly argues that music can be interpreted as a means of "explicat[ing] texts, listen[ing] to life, and hear[ing] its secrets". DiFranco's background as an independent feminist musician and spoken-word performer shapes the intersection of her music and poetry, allowing each to reinforce the political and emotional meanings of the other.

Inviting self-reflection is a main facet of DiFranco's understanding of folk music itself. Rather than viewing folk as a narrowly defined musical genre, she understands it as a communal practice through which experiences and stories are shared. As she explains, "Folk music is not an acoustic guitar [. . .] It's an attitude, it's an awareness of one's heritage,

and it's a community. It's subcorporate music that gives voice to different communities" (quoted in Love 2016, p. 170). Such a formulation is particularly significant when considered alongside the invitation presented in "Overlap" (1994) above. The listener is encouraged not to merely observe the art and artist but to find themselves within the parameters of the song itself as they watch their "own reflection superimposed". DiFranco's performances and practice operate as more than autobiographical expressions; they evolve into spaces of recognition and affiliation through which audiences may engage with the art in personal and meaningful ways.

4. Curating Queer Experience Through Song

> And both hands
> Now use both hands
> Oh, no don't close your eyes
> I am writing
> Graffiti on your body
> I am drawing the story of
> How hard we tried
>
> I am watching your chest rise and fall
> Like the tides of my life
> And the rest of it all
> And your bones have been my bedframe
> And your flesh has been my pillow
> I am waiting for sleep
> To offer up the deed
> With both hands
> With both hands (DiFranco 1990)

As Berlant and Warner (1995) argue, heterosexuality functions as a cultural norm that renders queer lives invisible through its presumption (p. 347). DiFranco resists this presumption not by explicitly declaring queerness in every song but by creating listening experiences that refuse heterosexuality as the default interpretive framework. Through her songs and poetry, DiFranco confronts this burden and creates the tools necessary for the cultivation of what Warner would call queer listening 'counterpublics', where the listener is invited to experience queerness through songs and poetry. In her memoir, DiFranco meditates on the craft of song-making, positioning it as a shapeless entity that finds itself through her interaction with it, an ambiguity that speaks more broadly to what queer is and can be: "A song might start wordlessly, while I'm just hanging out with my guitar. Just a chord progression and a groove. But always inside is a feeling, too. Some energy, some exact color, trying to make itself known" (DiFranco 2020, p. 69). The songs and poetry of DiFranco can at times be opaque, ambiguous, or fully charged with hermetic symbolism with overly evocative tones and a verbosity that can leave the listener confused. At the same time, songs that address queerness and speak to queer themes are more directed and franker, frequently exposing the assumptions of heteronormativity that structure everyday life. Her early-career queer songs garnered the attention of the lesbian community, as they involved a raw emotional depth that mirrored the lived experience of many queer women of that time (Feigenbaum 2005, p. 38; Quirino 2000, p. 32). While a song such as "Both Hands" from her eponymous 1990 debut album describes intimacy, queerness is not always declared fiercely, even though heterosexuality should not always be presumed. Because heterosexuality is culturally presumed (Berlant and Warner 1995), listeners may initially interpret the song as conventionally romantic or heterornormative. Yet DiFranco's refusal

to gender either speaker or lover unsettles that presumption, opening the song to queer modes of listening. The track showcases DiFranco's signature guitar plucking contrasting with the, at times, softer voice. The intimacy of the song's persona and her lover using "both hands" could be re-read and re-evaluated as a completely heterosexual or normative depiction of sexuality. Viewed through Warner's critique of heterosexual presumption, the song becomes less a gender-neutral love song than a deliberate refusal to privilege heterosexuality as the default reading. Deliberately resisting pronouns, this song speaks to rejection and loneliness after a breakdown in a romance: "And I am walking/Out in the rain/And I am listening to the low moan of the dial tone again/And I am getting nowhere with you/And I can't let it go/And I can't get through." (DiFranco 1990). The song's rhythmic guitar and carefully crafted lyrics are central to DiFranco's earlier work, inviting listeners to suspend heterosexual assumptions and participate instead in the queer listening practices that Warner imagines as resisting normative public culture.

DiFranco's grassroots popularity throughout the 1990s grew, particularly within college campus women's and queer clubs across the United States, as she continued to curate and cultivate queer community. It is worth noting that DiFranco had been continuously haunted by the "is-she-isn't-she" rhetoric. In an article with *The Advocate*, DiFranco at the time states that she "always call[s] myself queer" (Quirino 2000, p. 45). Although DiFranco's sexual identity need not determine how she curates queer listening experiences, she nevertheless engages queer themes in songs such as "On Every Corner" from her second studio album *Not So Soft* (DiFranco 1991). The song captures the moral and societal panic of the HIV and AIDS pandemic and is a staunchly political and personal take on what was widely constructed and accepted as a "gay disease." Dean Farrell states that such labelling was unjustly positioned and linked to the queer community, where HIV and AIDS affected many people outside of the queer community (Farrell 2025, p. 14). It was during the early days of the pandemic that created social and cultural links with gay men, particularly, and it is through that lens that DiFranco fights back against such falsehoods. Interestingly, AIDS is personified as a masculine figure that delivers death through sex: "death/has been your lover/he has brought you/. . . and I am looking forward/to looking back on these days/when on every corner/someone holds a sign/that says I'm homeless/I'm hungry and/I have AIDS" (DiFranco 1991). AIDS activism increasingly organised itself around affinity and coalition rather than fixed identity categories and queerness was often pathologised and medicialised (Halperin 1995, p. 28). The song does not simply correlate HIV or AIDS to queer men, but speaks to social isolation, poverty, and marginalisation, and how this intersects with sex and sexuality. Read through Halperin's (1995) conception of queerness as a transgressive positionality that resists normative categorisation, the song refuses to reduce HIV/AIDS to a singular queer identity. Instead, it foregrounds overlapping experiences of illness, poverty, stigma, and exclusion, inviting listeners to understand queerness through coalition and shared marginalisation rather than fixed identity categories. DiFranco has continued to curate queer responses to disease in later songs, particularly in her most recent album, *Revolutionary Love* (DiFranco 2021), which features the song "Contagious." The song traces a line from the generational trauma of the HIV and AIDS epidemic to a post-COVID-19 world, where questions of contagion, stigma, and collective care remain as relevant as ever to queer communities. In Halperin's terms, this continuity reaffirms forms of affiliation and anti-normative solidarity that resist fixed identity categories and instead emerge through shared experiences of vulnerability: "I'm not beneath you/I'm not above/in the center/I put love" (DiFranco 2021).

Although DiFranco's catalogue lends itself to queer interpretation throughout, *Not So Soft* (DiFranco 1991) and *Imperfectly* (DiFranco 1992) represent significant moments in the development of her queer aesthetic, deepening the relationship between her work and

queer audiences. One force that should not be discounted is compulsorily heterosexuality, which is detailed by Rich (1980) and focuses on the ways in which men control the sexuality of women within patriarchal structures. In "The Whole Night," we see the persona of the song as she struggles with her feelings towards another woman. The song's city setting of New York provides a sense of anonymity and disguise for the persona, offering a safe space for the exploration of queer sex and sexuality: "We can touch/touch our girl cheeks/we can hold hands/like paper dolls/we can try/try each other on/in the privacy/within New York City's walls" (DiFranco 1991). The coding of a city space can "emphasize both erotic and more functional conceptions of sexuality" (Knopp 1995, p. 137) and is a space that is able to proliferate and support queer sex and sexuality. That being said, the confines of heteronormativity maintain a grasp on the persona's decisions as she walks away from the scenario she finds herself in: "We can kiss/Kiss goodnight/And we can go home wondering/What would it be like if/If I did not have a boyfriend/We could spend/The whole night…" (DiFranco 1991). This exploration is marked by a sense of longing and uncertainty, which is further etched in and echoed in "She Says," also from *Not So Soft*. In this song, two women experience a fleeting, passionate encounter, but one of them recognizes that the moment cannot last: "You know I have no vacancy/and it's awfully cold outside tonight" (DiFranco 1991). The song ends with hope, as the singer dreams of finding the love she deserves: "Maybe someday, maybe somehow." In Halperin's terms, these moments of longing and uncertainty position queerness as an anti-normative mode of being that resists the certainties of heterosexuality, leaving its thresholds open to interrogation.

Where the earlier songs explored queer desire through ambiguity and indeterminacy, *Imperfectly* (DiFranco 1992) marks a shift towards a more explicit engagement with queer identity and gender. This is not to suggest that DiFranco's earlier work was devoid of queerness; rather, the third album articulates that queerness more directly, strengthening the feminist and queer listening experience she curates for her audience. In "In or Out," the singer confronts the internalised shame associated with queerness as she sings, "Guess there's something wrong with me/Guess I don't fit in/No one wants to touch it/No one knows where to begin" (DiFranco 1992). With immediacy and urgency, the initial verses reflect what many of her queer listeners experience. She sings of the fluidity of her gender and sexual identity: "Some days the line I walk/turns out to be straight/other days the line/tends to deviate." Butler (1993, p. 313) argues that "heterosexualized gender" depends upon the repeated performance of culturally intelligible masculine and feminine identities. Rather than reproducing normative categories, the song unsettles them, inviting listeners to imagine gender and sexuality beyond the heterosexual matrix: "He Says 'Call me, Miss DiFranco/If there's anything I can do'/I say/'It's Mr. DiFranco to you'" (DiFranco 1992). By insisting "It's Mr. DiFranco to you," DiFranco disrupts those expectations, refusing the gender designation imposed upon her and exposing gender identity as contingent rather than fixed. Digging deeper into the song, two forces are at play: patriarchal society and Rich's 'compulsory heterosexuality'. DiFranco further explores this in the song, directly addressing assumptions of patriarchy: "He looks me up and down/Like he knows what time it is/Like he's got my number/Like he thinks it's his" (DiFranco 1992). Rather than conforming to what Butler (1990, p. 140) describes as the "tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions," DiFranco instead celebrates a gender identity that remains fluid, contingent, and resistant to categorisation.

5. Feminist Performance, "Emotional Mobilization", and Embodied Resistance

I'm no heroine

at least, not last time I checked
I'm too easy to roll over
I'm too easy to wreck
I just write about
what I should have done
I just sing

what I wish I could say
and hope somewhere
some woman hears my music
and it helps her through her day. (DiFranco 1992)

Ani DiFranco's "declaration of independence [from the patriarchy]. . . has given the same sense of freedom to many of her fans" (Quirino 2000, p. 125) as she curates a feminist and queer experience for her listeners. Whether Ani DiFranco is best understood as a third- or fourth-wave feminist remains debated, but much of her political writing on gender is intersectional in nature (Love 2016, p. 161). Her craft has evolved while taking on new forms, resonating with an ever-changing sociocultural landscape. As Love notes, despite being pigeonholed into the "angry female singer" category, DiFranco refuses to be confined by this label, instead redirecting the conversation to her political engagement through art (Love 2016, p. 166). It is through this approach that feminist and queer communities of affiliation emerge. In the song "I'm no heroine" from the album *Imperfectly* (DiFranco 1992), DiFranco shares that this mode of expression is not one that is "performative" in nature, but a role that she reluctantly accepts in the hope that "some woman hears my music/and it helps her through her day." Reger sees this aspect of DiFranco's work as "emotional mobilization" that speaks to both men and women; a performance of feminism that embodies deep personal and political resistance (Reger 2007, p. 1351). As this mobilisation and assimilation of feminist audiences have continued to develop, DiFranco's art serves to empower her audiences to engage with questions of gender and feminism. By rejecting the role of feminist "heroine," DiFranco instead empowers her listeners to participate in feminist resistance themselves. Butler's (2024) recent work *Who's Afraid of Gender?* argues that contemporary moral panics seek to regulate gender by presenting non-normative identities as threats to the status quo. Read through Butler's account of contemporary anti-gender politics, DiFranco's performances become acts of feminist resistance that encourage audiences not simply to witness critique but to participate in it. Her work similarly resists this regulation through performances that challenge patriarchal assumptions about gender, sexuality, and bodily autonomy. Rather than accepting these norms as inevitable, her songs invite listeners to question the structures that produce them. As DiFranco states in terms of the #MeToo movement that she "was a little ahead of that wave that's thankfully cresting, where women's stories and female perspectives are becoming undeniable in a broader way." (DiFranco and Rosen 2026, p. 65). Long before the emergence of the #MeToo movement that "rocked centres of power, from politics to entertainment and business" (Walsh 2018, p. 173–74), DiFranco's songwriting articulated many of the same critiques of patriarchal power that later came to define the movement's public discourse.

"Lost Woman Song" (1990) from DiFranco's debut album deals with an intensely personal experience of abortion. Inspired by poet Lucille Clifton's "The Lost Baby Poem", Quirino sees the invocation of Clifton as a "comforting touch [that] shows that there are still some souls who avoid pre-judging, choosing instead to be compassionate" (Quirino 2000, p. 104). The song recounts how a woman has "opened a bank account/when I was nine years old/I closed it when I was eighteen/I gave them very penny that I'd saved/And they

gave my blood and my urine a number/And now I'm sitting in this waiting room/Playing with the toys" (DiFranco 1990). Instead of framing the first stanza of the song as an argument about abortion, DiFranco instead uses vulnerability; a woman who has lost everything to avail of basic medical care. Through the repetition of "my freedom of choice" and "our freedom of choice," DiFranco insists on galvanising emotional mobilisation of her audience as it curates and steers the audience to being in that waiting room with the persona. Abortion here is not just a "moral" dilemma, it is a question of autonomy and care in a society where the persona "passed their hand-held signs/I went through their picket lines" but was met with a "hand for me to hold" (DiFranco 1990). Outside of the clinic, the protestors lack sympathy, empathy or understanding, but it is within the parameters of the clinic where the persona is met with calm and kindness. Although released in 1990, the song captures the current struggles for reproductive care in the United States as she says, "The profile of our country/Looks a little less hard-nosed/But you know that picket line persisted/And that clinic since been closed" (DiFranco 1990). Abortion, however, is a personal matter, but DiFranco's use of it in her song here has provided a shared feminist experience and collective political identity for her listeners. Later songs such as *To the Teeth's* "Hello Birmingham" (DiFranco 1999) and the more recent "Baby Rowe" from *Revolutionary Love* (DiFranco 2021) show DiFranco's commitment to consistently returning to the question of reproductive freedom, emotionally mobilising her audiences and, in turn, fostering communities of affiliation Similarly, menstruation as a personal but political act also shines through in the song "Blood in the Boardroom" from the album *Puddle Dive* (DiFranco 1994) where the persona "just left a big brown blood stain on their [music executives'] white chair" as a tool to confront masculine authority who are "the suits" and in "their world" where "these businessmen can smell me bleeding from my underwear." While abortion leaves traces on the persona emotionally, menstruation leaves bodily traces as a form of protest signaling that her body is a tool that can be used to navigate the layers of feminism. This ongoing thread in DiFranco's work illustrates Warner's argument that "Most people cannot quite rid themselves of the sense that controlling the sex of others, far from being unethical, is where morality begins" (Warner 2000, p. 1). By foregrounding abortion and menstruation as public rather than private concerns, DiFranco questions precisely this moral regulation of women's bodies.

It is not only through songwriting that DiFranco acts as a mediator between her own political philosophies and her audience, but also through her spoken-word poetry. DiFranco routinely sets aside at least one slot of her expansive performance setlists to one of her spoken-word poems, some of which are accompanied by soft guitar harmonics or by the bass guitar of Todd Sickafoose. One such poem that expands the embodiment of politics and transports her audience to a collective body politic is seen (and heard) in the poem "Self Evident" which first appears on the 2002 live album *So Much Shouting, So Much Laughter*. In the official bootleg of *Carnegie Hall: April 6, 2002* (DiFranco 2006) we hear DiFranco perform the poem to a mostly New York audience for the first time. In her memoir, DiFranco talks about the development of the poem as a living, breathing piece of art, that was written just after the September 11th terrorist attacks on New York City: "I wrote and I wrote and I wrote and I wrote. I unfolded a different permutation of a poem that came to be called "Self Evident." I attempted to engage people directly with this poem in real time. But now here I was, laying a poem about 9/11 down on the very people who had shouldered the brunt of the violence, the brunt of the loss." (DiFranco 2020, p. 3) As DiFranco states at the start of this poem "us people, are just poems," the poet asks her listeners to see the humanity in each other rather than just through her art. The palpable grief of the recording coupled with the uncensored rage is knitted throughout the piece. Moving from the song "Serpentine" to "Self Evident" on the setlist mirrors the urgency

DiFranco wants to evoke: this is the time to communicate directly with her community and to mobilise them emotionally through provocative language: "so here's a toast to all the folks who live in Palestine/Afghanistan/Iraq/El Salvador/here's a toast to the folks living on the Pine Ridge reservation/under the stone cold gaze of Mount Rushmore/here's a toast to all those nurses and doctors/who daily provide women with a choice/who stand down a threat the size of Oklahoma City/just to listen to a young woman's voice." (DiFranco 2002). This in turn shows us a feminist resistance to Western failings and presents us with anti-war dissent through a desperate plea for peace. The poem culminates and continues in another one of her spoken-word poems titled "Grand Canyon" (DiFranco 2004) from the studio album *Educated Guess*, which asks for the rebuilding of community as a response to tragedy: "I love my country/by which I mean/I am indebted joyfully/to all the people throughout its history/who have fought the government to make right."

Through performing her songs and poetry, DiFranco states that "women have the power to shake each other awake and animate each other's voices. Feminism 101 cemented my will to become a part of that process of breaking silences and challenging the code of resignation surrounding patriarchy." (DiFranco 2020, p. 98). Her songs and poetry are imbued with a resistance to the regimes of power and attempt to mobilise her community of listeners through her art. Questions of gender, of patriarchy, and of womanhood can be traced through DiFranco's work as an ongoing political and poetic project. Her work is not just about regaling stories about feminism; she curates feminist experiences through and with her audience.

6. Conclusions

> "The queer community has been fighting for so long for an open, inclusive acceptance of indifference [. . ..] They know it's not just black and white. These socially constructed divisions can only be overly simplistic and claustrophobic, at least speaking for myself." (DiFranco in Quirino 2000, p. 47)

Ani DiFranco's reflection on queerness above reflects the artistic and political philosophy that has underpinned her work for more than three decades. More than a folksinger, DiFranco has refused to be confined by categories of gender, sexuality, politics, or musical genre. Instead, DiFranco invites her listeners into spaces where there is a vulnerability, an ambiguity, and a collective consciousness where listeners are brought together as a community of affiliation. In one of her earlier songs, "Out of Habit," from her debut album, the singer professes "Art is why I get up in the morning/My definition ends there/It doesn't seem fair/That I'm living for something/I can't even define/There you are right there/in the meantime." (DiFranco 1990). Ultimately, DiFranco's significance not only lies in the political themes of her work, but in the communities that she continues to foster; without an audience her art is a one-way street. More than thirty years since the release of her debut album, DiFranco still continues to release music as a vehicle to create dialogue, mobilise resistance, and continues to nourish her audiences both politically and emotionally.

In her spoken-word poem "Fuel" from the album *Little Plastic Castle* (DiFranco 1998), DiFranco sums up how her politics and her artistic expressions need further exploration and excavation. As we return to New York City in this fierce piece, she asks: "Am I headed for the same brick wall/Is there anything I can do about/Anything at all?/Except go back to that corner in Manhattan/And dig deeper, dig deeper this time." Using the tools here, let us continue to dig deeper into how art can create communities of affiliation and foster feminist and queer audiences.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

https://doi.org/10.3390/arts15080186

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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