

“You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)”—Sylvester (1978)

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Essay by Sandra Bernhard (guest post)*



Sylvester

In various garb Sylvester broke gender norms in a time before it was a political movement. “Mighty Real” is a disco, gay anthem from 1978 when sexuality was cracking open in brave new ways. Sylvester set the table for the present day and should be given his due.

The song is explosive and demands that you get up on the dance floor. And like all great music it electrifies and unites a club full of people in a tribal way. “Mighty Real” manages to bring everyone together while allowing the individual to create their own little world, as it pulses and urges the reveler to shed doubts and fears.

A bigger-than-life presence on the San Francisco dance scene, Sylvester was beautiful--soft yet incredibly strong. He escaped a religious gospel childhood where he was met with judgment, rejection. He fled LA for Northern California and the revolutionary scene of Castro Street becoming the emblematic reflection of that time. His music was the backdrop to the coming change of Gay acceptance.

It resonates to this day. Listen: “*You make me feel Mighty Real!*”

You can feel it, your true self, real. And simultaneously enable another, allow them, give strength and permission...to feel. To be *who* you are, deeply.

Sexuality is ever evolving, but at the core of gayness is a sense of fun and crazy abandon, and no song better captures that sentiment. Sylvester had style and comfort in his skin, he gave everyone permission to be as funky as they wanted to be, and then anointed them for it. Commanding everyone to find their center and to be at peace with it.

This is his magical legacy and it lives on every time “Mighty Real” lures us onto the dance floor where we can escape into its tantalizing beat.

Sandra Bernhard is an actress, comedian, author and musician. She has often performed “You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real).” Ms. Bernhard’s website is www.Sandraberhard.com.

**The views expressed in this essay are those of the author and may not reflect those of the Library of Congress.*