

Grief Karaoke



EVERY WEDNESDAY
2PM TILL 6PM



KARAOKE
PARTY

Poster in the window of Blackpool Catholic Club

City coroners, underfunded, don't always work around the clock. When someone dies in the middle of the night, they get trapped in a municipal limbo where the corpse remains inside its death. As a response, a grassroots movement was formed as a communal salve. Neighbors, having learned of a sudden death, would, in under an hour, pool money and hire a troupe of drag performers for what was called "delaying sadness."

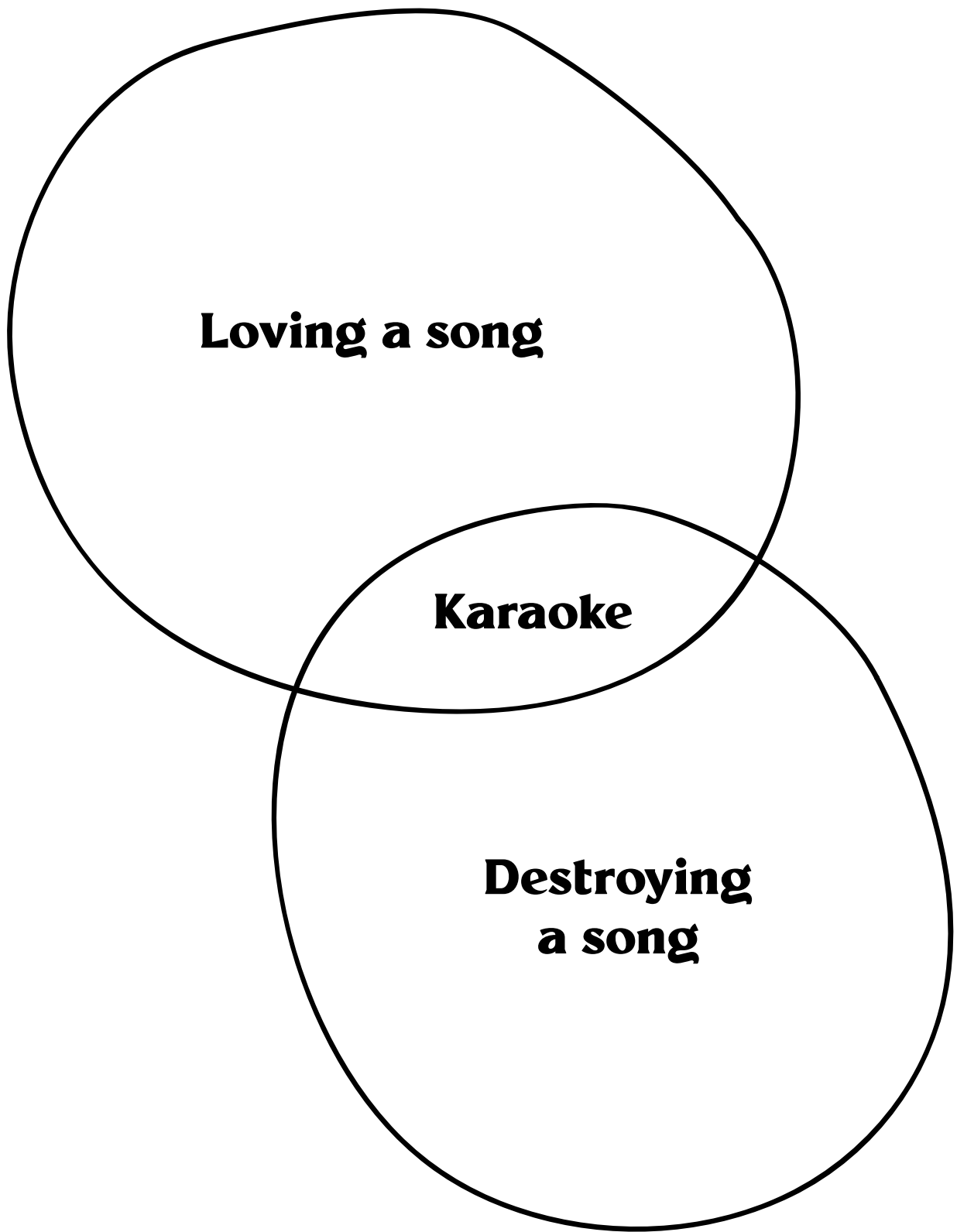
In Saigon, the sound of music and children playing this late in the night is a sign of death—or rather, a sign of a community attempting to heal.

It's through the drag performers' explosive outfits and gestures, their overdrawn faces and voices, their tabooed trespass of gender, that this relief, through extravagant spectacle, is manifest. As much as they are useful, paid, and empowered as a vital service in a society where to be queer is still a sin, the drag queens are, for as long as the dead lie in the open, an othered performance. Their presumed, reliable fraudulence is what makes their presence, to the mourners, necessary. Because grief, at its worst, is unreal. And it calls for a surreal response. The queens—in this way—are unicorns.

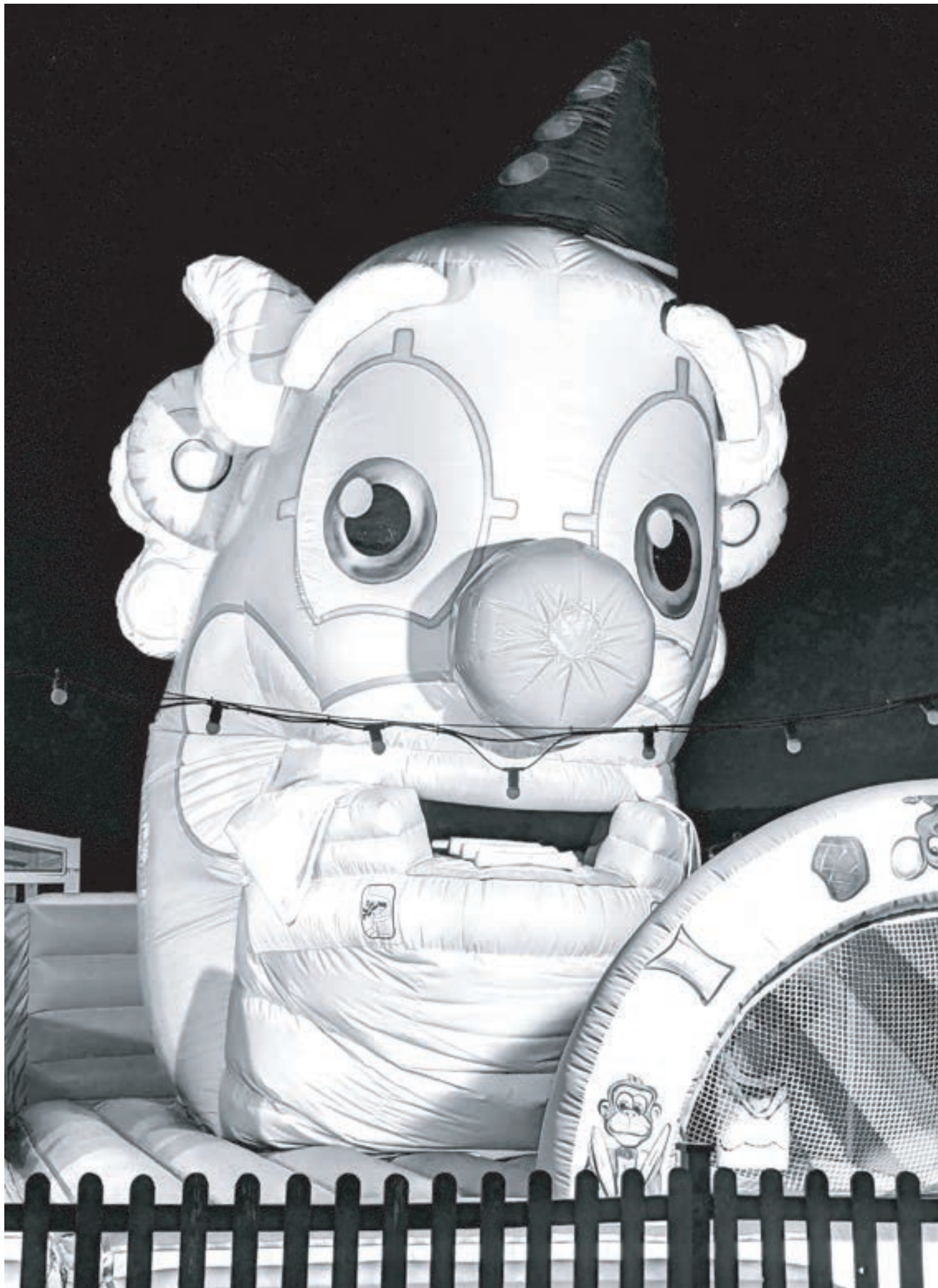
Unicorns stamping in a graveyard.



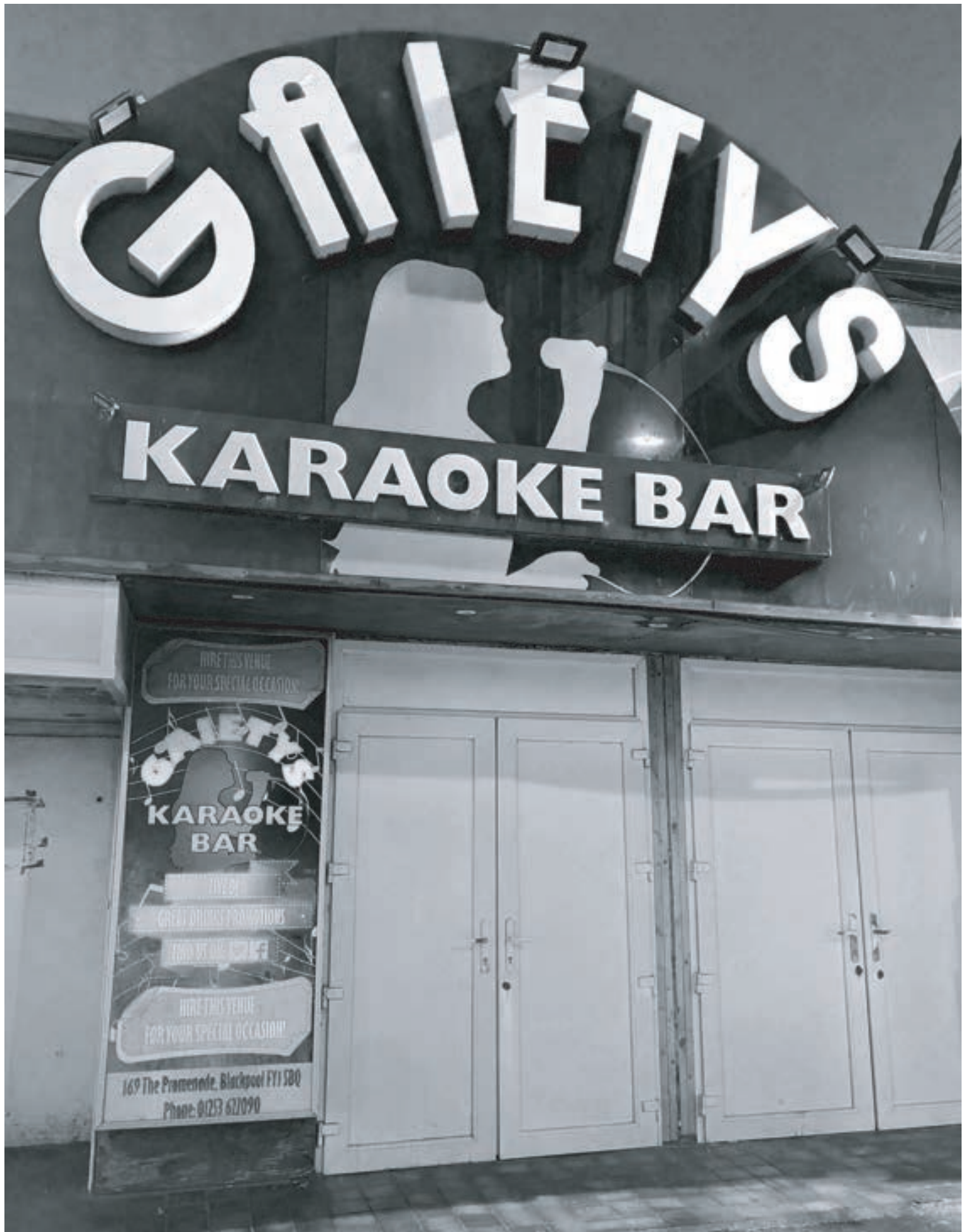
Stained glass on the awning of the Grand Theatre, Blackpool



**Karaoke is
about energy
not quality***



Inflatable clown on Blackpool Beachfront



Gaiety's Karaoke Bar, Blackpool

I pedaled faster, I moved, briefly unmoored.
Trevor, beside me, was singing the 50 Cent song.

His voice sounded oddly young, as if it had come back from a time before I met him. As if I could turn and find a boy with a denim jacket laundered by his mom, detergent wafting up and through his hair still blond above baby-plump cheeks, training wheels rattling on the pavement.

I joined him.

"Many men, many, many, many, many men."

We sang, nearly shouting the lyrics, the wind clipping at our voices. They say a song can be a bridge, Ma. But I say it's also the ground we stand on. And maybe we sing to keep ourselves from falling. Maybe we sing to keep ourselves.

"Wish death 'pon me. Lord I don't cry no more, don't look to the sky no more. Have mercy on me."

In the blue living rooms we passed, the football game was dying down.

"Blood in my eye dawg and I can't see."

In the blue living rooms, some people won and some people lost.

In this way, autumn passed.

Popular karaoke songs

My Way

Popular funeral songs



Photograph of Frank Sinatra, original photographer unknown; found on the exterior of Blackpool Opera House. Sinatra performed in Blackpool twice; 1950 and 1953.

**Which song
would you
choose for
your funeral?**

Write it on this poster

The Most Popular Funeral Songs

1. Time to Say Goodbye, Sarah Brightman & Andrea Bocelli
2. My Way, Frank Sinatra
3. Supermarket Flowers, Ed Sheeran
4. Wind Beneath my Wings, Bette Midler
5. We'll Meet Again, Vera Lynn
6. Somewhere Over the Rainbow, Eva Cassidy
7. You'll Never Walk Alone, Gerry and the Peacemakers
8. All Things Bright and Beautiful (Hymn)
9. Abide With Me (Hymn)
10. Dancing In The Sky, Dani and Lizzy

GRIEF KARAOKE SIGN UP SHEET

	Your name	Song title	Artist	Any other info? (e.g. original or karaoke version)	
✓	Sunshine	Vision of Love	Mariah Carey	Karaoke	✓
⊖	Chris A	Detektorists (Home song)	Johnny Flynn	Karaoke version	✓ Pennies from Heaven Hot Club of Columbia
✓	Joe	Perfect Day	Lou Reed	Karaoke version	
✓	Jed	Rock lobster	B52s	Karaoke version / lyrics.	
✓	Chu	觸不到的愛	小虎	Karaoke version	✓
✓	Clara	光輝歲月	Beyond	http://youtu.be/i1JCWmOQ1bl?feature=shared	✓
	David Redden	None. Just here for good vibes ☺	See previous comment :p	Nope! ☺	
✗	Emily	I'm not okay (I promise)	MCR		
✓	Camilla	Satellite of Love	Lou Reed	/	
✓	Leah	the makings of you	Curtis Mayfield	Karaoke version.	
✓	Olivia	I'm alive	Celine Dion	2nd	✓
⊖	Leah	America	West Side Story (original version)	Karaoke version	
✓	Ruth	Pennies from Heaven	Hot Club of Columbia	—	
✓	Debs	Somewhere only we know	Kate Lily Allen	Karaoke	
✗	Sunshine	Sometimes it snows in April	Prince	Karaoke	
	Leah	I just called to say I love you	Steve Wonder	Karaoke version	

**“...and so I
face the
final curtain”**

Around the age of 15 I fell in love with David Bowie. I listened to his albums on repeat in my room, obsessively reading the lyric books as if they contained the answers to my tentative questions about my own gender and sexuality. He was my first bisexual icon and I adored him. When I got to uni I proudly told people at parties that my favourite musician was Bowie – I knew it was a very cool answer.

David Bowie died on the same day that my Dad died. My friends knew something was wrong, because there was radio silence on the group chat from me when his death was announced. I had a bigger death to deal with. And didn't care. I felt irrationally pissed off that David Bowie had had the audacity to die on the same day as my Dad.

For months, Bowie was played everywhere, as the world mourned his loss. Each commemoration was a reminder of my bigger, more devastating loss. The songs stopped reminding me of freedom and exploration and started reminding me of the hospital ward, of the worst days of my life.

To delay being alone with my grief, I'd spend my evenings at exhibition openings, bars, pubs, parties. But Bowie followed me around, and I felt my blood pressure rise every time I heard the opening chords to *Ziggy Stardust*. I knew what was coming next; a chorus of people comparing how sad they were that Bowie had died. Their loss felt shallow and superfluous; a flamboyant performance of grief rather than my daily dirge. But the most depressing thing was, I knew this would be as close as I'd get to the conversation about grief that I needed. I rarely felt I had the permission to talk about my own loss, it was too large. People didn't know what to say, so they said nothing. It seemed like talking about grief was off the table, unless you were talking about someone famous, or someone you didn't know. Unless you were looking at grief from a safe distance.

I still don't listen to David Bowie, but I can hum along when his music comes on with fondness. He's starting to feel like an old friend I lost touch with. People have stopped being so publically sad that David Bowie died, and I've become better at talking about my grief. I've stopped looking for permission and started creating it; holding spaces, tending to my grief. One day, when I'm ready, I'd like to listen to *Diamond Dogs* and sing along to *Sweet Thing* again.

I struggle to use the past tense. Saying *I loved my Dad* isn't true. I still love him.

But using the present tense, *I love* feels like I'm tripping myself up. People assume he's alive and then it's really awkward and uncomfortable for everyone because he's not. I have to reveal my loss when I don't always want to be so vulnerable.

I'm in this language trap

Vocabulary emerges to address that which is deemed to be culturally important.

Grief can feel like a refusal to accept the terms of reality. You are carrying someone who is so definitively relegated to the past into the present. But there's no space for this in the English language.

It hurts to be forced to leave him there because of language (or lack of).

One of the things I wasn't prepared for in grief is how silent my world would become. Music overwhelms me now. It wants me to feel things I don't have the energy for. I can barely hold my own feelings, without being pulled around by the emotive chords and words of someone else.

My home is a quiet place now, and I forget how much music used to be a part of my daily life. I can go for days without hearing a note. I feel stressed when people ask me what my favourite bands are, because I don't know anymore. Grief makes me feel abnormal and misshapen, and I sometimes feel alone in my silent world when I see people on the train wearing headphones, or tell me the names of bands I'll probably never have the energy to hear.

Most of the music I listen to isn't by choice; the generic radio they play in the gym, or the shit tunes of a supermarket. I find this music painfully loud, and frequently well up in tescos. I hate that sad songs exist. I don't need a song to make me feel sad, I have grief for that. Losing my enjoyment of music was of the many smaller, additional losses that came with the biggest loss.

I've lost my permission to speak freely about my Dad. People look uncomfortable when I talk about him, because he reminds them of death. But he reminds me of everything in life that I love.

I feel like my Mum was keeping the roof on; keeping out the elements. Without her to shelter me, everything is different. I'm relearning the world.

I miss being young and carefree.

Additional losses

I lost the language to describe my experience.

I lost her, but gained all kinds of caring responsibilities that I hadn't anticipated.

When my Aunt died, I knew my relationship to her had changed forever, irreversibly. I wasn't prepared for how it would change my relationship to everyone else I knew too. I was 18, my friends no longer knew how to relate to me, or I to them.

The summer before my Mum died, we were walking through the town and I was humming absent-mindedly. Mum – in a moment of sudden recognition – clutched my arm and asked what it was. A passage from Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto in D major, as performed by Nicola Benedetti.

Before leaving for University, I'd ripped almost her entire classical CD collection to my laptop. Of the 15 or so albums, this one was my favourite. I told her what I was humming and why; she exclaimed that it was her favourite too.

She died 6 months later. Benedetti's violin played as the curtain drew around my Mum's coffin. My Aunt died 7 years later. Whilst I wasn't responsible for planning her funeral, I became responsible for planning my Grandparents' funerals.

I sat down with them and we went over the details. Where would it be held? Who would conduct the ceremony? Burial, cremation, or something else? And music? My Grandma was certain; *Don't Box Me In* by Stan Ridgway & Stewart Copeland.

My Grandad was less certain; he couldn't think of a single piece of music, which confused him. His memory had been fading for 5 years, due to dementia. He said he'd think about it and get back to me. He never did. He died 18 months later.



8 brass plaques on a bench in Stanley Park, Blackpool

In 2016, around 6 months after my Mum (Kathy) died, I made a small brass plaque, which read: *"If it could, this plaque would take you by the hand and speak to you in their voice."* The artwork tried to articulate the distance that I felt between my Mum and a brass plaque bearing her name; her dates. Her death was still raw and my grief couldn't be contained within the format's four corners. I wanted to summon what I'd never experience again; her hands, her voice.

My plaque imagined such a summoning, whilst trying to address a grief that wasn't only mine. It invited anyone to remember the hands and voice of someone they love and grieve for. It pushed back against what I construed as formality, stasis, and narrowness.

8 year later, whilst walking in Blackpool's Stanley Park, I noticed an abundance of brass plaques. As the sun began to set, the plaques burned with golden fire. Their surfaces came alive with light. I spent some time reading the inscriptions.

My grief is less raw now and I am less angry. I understand the brass plaques better. Without anchors, permission, and rituals for our grief, it's easy to forget to remember. I need rhythms and patterns that remind me to tend to my grief and stay in touch with my Mum; for some people that might be a visiting a bench and enjoying a favourite view.

I don't have a bench to visit and I'm not even entirely sure where my Mum's ashes are scattered. I know the general area, but I couldn't point to the exact spot. The best piece of brass for remembering my Mum is her trumpet; played by her sister after her death; played by her niece after her sister's death.

When her niece dies, I hope that it keeps being played.



A blank brass plaque on a bench in Stanley Park, Blackpool