

## There is a light and it never goes out

Tomas Jonsson

Karaoke, like decolonization, is better approached with vulnerability, sincerity and joy. **Time after time**, Peter Morin and Jimmie Kilpatrick have breathed magic through song and laughter. They have performed together in wheatfields, museums, the Double Decker (AKA the Church of Karaoke), Universities, on sidewalks, in hallways and along shorelines. Through the ever-growing iterations of their project *Love Songs to End Colonization*, there is a quality that carries beyond the conviviality of a heartfelt rendition of **I Will Survive**. In naming this elusive quality, Peter and Jimmie **still haven't found what they are looking for**. It is something **more than words**. There is a sacredness, a collective act of reframing.

Karaoke, like decolonization, doesn't demand virtuosity. The gauntlet to the stage is a welcoming one, thrown down by the hosts and those gathered. Everyone that sings engages in this process differently, everyone has to **go their own way**, and these moments are punctuated by hoots and hollers when collectively recognized. We sing not necessarily in tune but attuned. We don't appropriate the songs but inhabit them. As artist Kosisochukwu Nnebe notes, language is both a wound and a bridge.<sup>1</sup> We sing the words we have. We bend the lyrics, make them do a different thing, subversively changing the DNA of the songs until they **stop making sense**. The resonance stays and grows in our bodies and voices. Karaoke light shines outward. In exchange for the gift of our songs, we receive in turn a shirt that reveals the truth: we are the love songs.

The window display of the Ellen is a frozen moment, **a day in the life** of an imagined gathering of singers, demonstrating **the power of love**. The glow of neon signs and the refracted light from a disco ball shine over a growing archive of ephemera: the ubiquitous song slips from past gatherings; mannequins adorned in the beaded **blue jean** jackets of Peter and Jimmie, and T-shirts made by karaoke collaborators, including Tania Willard, Kevin De Forest, Susan Blight with Melody McIver, and Veronica Wachter.

A loop of karaoke videos plays on a TV, their sound transcending the glass partition and encouraging passersby to join in and sing their hearts out. These seven tracks are featured on the vinyl record of *Love Songs to End Colonization*, the first-ever Karaoke double LP, also included in the display.

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<sup>1</sup> Kosisochukwu Nnebe, "[Nna m, how do I say: 'Language is both the wound and the bridge'?](https://artexte.ca/en/articles/nna-m-how-do-i-say-language-is-both-the-wound-and-the-bridge/)" in *Articles: Field Notes*, 15 December 2021, Artexte, accessed May 20, 2026, <https://artexte.ca/en/articles/nna-m-how-do-i-say-language-is-both-the-wound-and-the-bridge/>.

*Love songs to End Colonization* is in affinity with projects such as Rebecca Belmore's *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother*, Luis Jacob's *Flashlight* and Cheryl L'Hirondelle's *yâhkaskwan mîhkiwap (light tipi)*, and her installation *Why the Caged Bird Sings*. These projects, and many others, revel in the small collective gestures that echo and amplify. In every iteration of *Love Songs to End Colonization*, each song is a match, we are each a spark. We join the little smoke that goes far as **an eternal flame** that is **burning down the house**.

Free of the gravity of colonialism, in a **moonage daydream** we form our own orbits and relations. What we gain is not the promised 15 minutes of **fame**, but the realization that **we are all made of stars**. Together we become a constellation, a galaxy. Basking under the **neon lights** rather than a **spotlight**, we are invited to **let our little lights shine**.