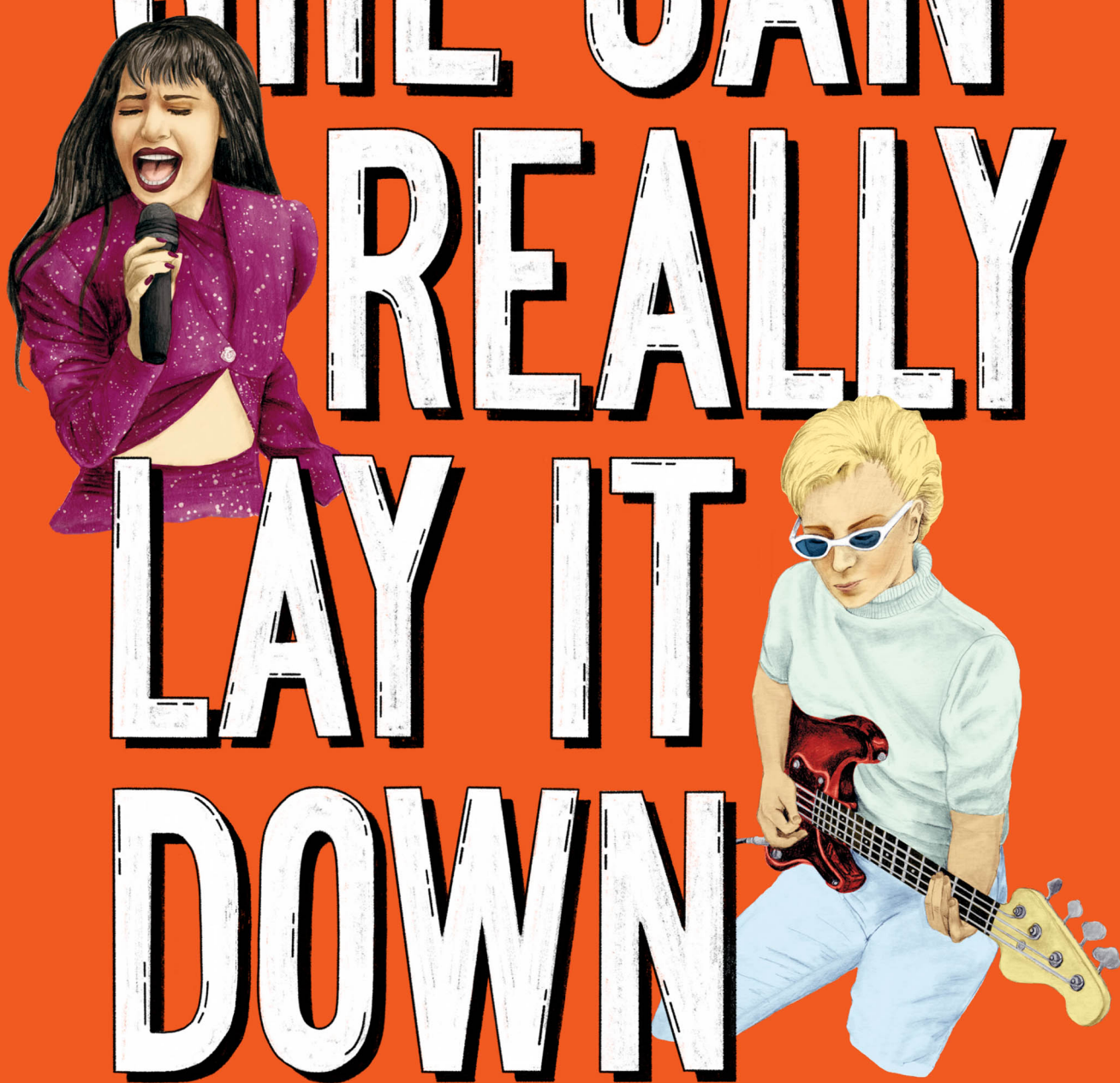


SHE CAN REALLY LAY IT DOWN

The cover features two illustrations. On the left, a woman with long dark hair and bangs is singing passionately into a black microphone. She is wearing a purple, long-sleeved, cropped jacket with a subtle star pattern. On the right, a woman with short blonde hair and white-rimmed sunglasses is playing a red electric guitar. She is wearing a light blue turtleneck sweater and light blue jeans. The background is a solid orange color.

**50 REBELS, ROCKERS & MUSICAL REVOLUTIONARIES
(WHO HAPPEN TO BE WOMEN)**

RACHEL FRANKEL

FOREWORD BY AMANDA PETRUSICH

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MUSICAL REVOLUTIONARIES
(WHO HAPPEN TO BE WOMEN)**

RACHEL FRANKEL
FOREWORD BY AMANDA PETRUSICH

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**FOR ALL WOMEN
WHO MAKE NOISE**

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For centuries, women musicians have been “seen”—beheld, judged, appraised, rejected, devoured—by their male critics and peers. Which is to say, they’ve been written into corners and out of narratives, cast in supporting roles or cast out entirely. In many instances, extraordinary acts of ingenuity, bravery, or virtuosity were ignored or overlooked in favor of the perpetuation of some other myth—maybe the one about the lone, itinerant troubadour who couldn’t manage his relationships and his art simultaneously (instead, he’s always loping off toward some distant horizon, gone to transform anguish into gold). I’ll admit that those old stories—the tortured male savant, undone by his work—are romantic. I’m sure I’ve reiterated a few in my own writing. After all, anyone who has listened to any music at all in the twenty-first century has internalized some fairly odious notions about genius, and who gets to claim it. But this is part of what makes Rachel Frankel’s *She Can Really Lay It Down* feel so revelatory. These remarkable women aren’t just being acknowledged, they’re being seen in the best way possible: drawn into life by an artist who understands what animates them, and what their incredible work means to us all.

There’s so much joy and glory in these portraits! Some faces will be familiar—Bonnie Raitt, Nina Simone, Amy Winehouse, Joni Mitchell—but others are newer, more obscure, more overlooked. Each drawing comes with a story: an explanation of who that artist is, where

she came from, and how she came to make the music she does. I was riveted to read about the gusty freight train-hopping and busking of Alynda Lee Segarra, the Nuyorican songwriter and activist of Hurray for the Riff Raff. And Selena Quintanilla-Pérez, the queen of Tejano music, rendered here mid-song, her face ecstatic and wild. And Odetta, a beacon of the folk revival, her expression calm and serious. There are musicians who work in explicitly punk-rock modes—like Janet Weiss, of Sleater-Kinney, and Annie Clark, who performs as St. Vincent—but all of the women of *She Can Really Lay It Down* share a spirit of rebelliousness and, to a degree, fearlessness. They insisted upon themselves when it wasn’t easy.

The present—if long overdue—push toward a more progressive, feminist reading of our cultural history requires disabusing ourselves of known canons, and some pretty deeply entrenched ideas about the history of popular music. *She Can Really Lay It Down* is not just a corrective to those stories, but also a giddy celebration of the future. I, for one, can’t wait to hear what’s coming.

—AMANDA PETRUSICH

INTRODUCTION

At fourteen years old, I couldn't imagine anything cooler than playing in a band. Clumsily working through my first few sets of guitar chord progressions, I developed my musicianship over the next few years, and my taste in music began to expand beyond the likes of whatever eight songs KROQ, my local rock radio station, played on endless rotation in the early 2000s. As I progressed as a musician through college and learned more about feminism, I vividly remember the excitement and sense of belonging I felt in continuing to discover music played and written by women. Singular musicians like Nina Simone, Neko Case, Amy Winehouse, and Kathleen Hanna particularly stood out to me as powerful acts of defiance against a male-dominated industry.

Years later, I began recording music and playing shows with my own band. I soon began picking up on the stereotypes and subtle microaggressions that often plague female-identifying musicians:

- Being mistaken for a roadie;
- Being mistaken for a girlfriend;
- Being ignored by male peers as they engage in hearty conversation with my male bandmates;
- Hearing a male singer referring to a venue staff member as his "merch babe";
- Overhearing sexist remarks from the audio engineer.

When it came to press, I began to scrutinize headlines more closely, noticing the proliferation of belittling gendered modifiers like "female-fronted," "all-girl," or the dreaded "woman in music." My experiences and frustrations, along with those of my peer female musicians and role models, inspired me to dig deeper. I noticed a dearth of music-related resources that catered to women, much less covered women musicians at all without a gender bias, positioning them as anomalies, or worse—using women as bikini-clad accessories to merchandise products (thanks, *Guitar World*). Publications like *She Shreds* and *Tom Tom Magazine* stand out in a sea of misogynistic magazine covers staring back at me from newsstands and bookstore aisles. Fabi Reyna and Mindy Abovitz, along with their respective magazine staffers, eschew the reductive classification of "women musicians"—their magazines speak directly to drummers and guitarists who simply happen to identify as female. It was my discovery of these vital publications, in fact, that gave me the idea for this book.

In beginning my research for this collection, I looked first to some of my personal favorite musicians to see who had influenced them. In digging through Laura Veirs's catalog, I stumbled across an Elizabeth Cotten cover, and I discovered Laura's original song, "Carol Kaye," which pays direct homage to one of the most prolific and widely heard bassists in the world.

*"She can really play it
she can really lay it down
'Smile,' 'Good Vibrations,'
'Help Me, Rhonda,' 'Homeward Bound'"*

From that point came several sprawling lists of influential musicians from different genres and decades. Memphis Minnie left behind a legacy of defining the blues; Sister Rosetta Tharpe was one of the first electric guitarists to innovate with heavy distortion. This deep history dive eventually broadened my search, turning what was originally a rock and pop nerd-fest into a full-blown international quest that blew past any and all genre distinctions.

She Can Really Lay It Down is my humble, heartfelt love letter to fifty of the most groundbreaking musicians

in recent history—all of whom have defied genre, sexism, and convention to expand what it truly means to be a woman in music. This list is by no means exhaustive—the sheer number of contenders for inclusion in a collection like this is staggering. With this collection, I aimed specifically to highlight musicians not only for their talent, but for creating and expanding new genres, catalyzing social change, and bringing visibility to causes and communities that are often marginalized. Some of these names might sound familiar. Others may not be so well-known. Some of these women are still with us; some have passed on—but their contributions to the music world and to our culture will resonate forever. I hope that these influential heroines and their stories bring you solace, inspiration, and a reminder to continue their legacy of revolution and progress through your own musical expression.

ELIZABETH COTTEN

1890s–JUNE 29, 1987

Elizabeth “Libba” Cotten was a folk guitarist, singer, and songwriter, and remains one of the most celebrated American blues and folk musicians of all time. Born Elizabeth Nevills in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, she grew up in a musical family with four siblings. At age seven, she sneakily borrowed her older brother’s banjo and guitar in order to teach herself how to play. As a lefty, Elizabeth would reverse the banjo and guitar by fretting the strings with her right hand and playing with her left. Because she did not change the position or tuning of the strings, she developed a unique style of playing the bass notes with her fingers and the melody with her thumb—an alternating style now known as “Cotten picking.”

Elizabeth began to write original songs in her preteen years, including the widely known “Freight Train,” inspired by her hometown and the nearby trains that she’d hear at night. At fifteen, she married Frank Cotten and gave birth to her daughter, Lillie, and the demands of family life combined with pressure from her church drove her away from playing guitar and writing songs for nearly forty years. The family moved around between Chapel Hill, New York City, and Washington, D.C., before Elizabeth divorced Frank and moved in with her daughter and her family.

While Elizabeth was working in a D.C. department store, she discovered a lost child wandering around, who turned out to be none other than Peggy Seeger, the daughter of prominent folk musicians Ruth Crawford

Seeger and Charles Seeger. After she had returned Peggy to her mother, the two older women became friends, and Elizabeth worked as a housekeeper for the Seeger family for several years. It was during this time that the Seegers discovered Elizabeth’s hidden musical talents, and Ruth’s son Mike Seeger, younger brother of Pete, began making bedroom reel-to-reel recordings of her original songs.

Some of these recordings would comprise the 1958 LP release *Freight Train and Other North Carolina Folk Songs and Tunes*, released when Elizabeth was sixty-four years old. She went on to play several large venues during the folk revival in the early 1960s, including the Newport Folk Festival and the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Elizabeth’s newfound fame and success allowed her to move her entire family to a new home in Syracuse, New York, and she continued to tour and release records well into her eighties. Her songs have been covered by the likes of Bob Dylan; the Beatles; the Grateful Dead; Peter, Paul, and Mary; Laura Veirs; and many others.



Memphis Minnie

JUNE 3, 1897–AUGUST 6, 1973

Memphis Minnie was a highly influential vocalist and guitarist who played a large part in the evolution of the Chicago blues scene from the 1930s onward. Born Lizzie Douglas and raised in Walls, Mississippi, Lizzie was the eldest of thirteen siblings, nicknamed “Kid” by her parents. At eight years old, she received her very first guitar as a Christmas present; by age eleven she could play the banjo, too.

When she was thirteen, she ran away from home to Beale Street in Memphis, Tennessee. There, she began performing under the name Kid Douglas on street corners with jug bands and string groups, which were some of the earliest examples of the Memphis blues style of music, influenced by country and African-American traditional genres. These groups often employed the use of homemade instruments, created from items such as spoons, washboards, combs, and tissue paper. After a brief stint as a touring musician with the Ringling Bros. Circus, Lizzie settled back into the Beale Street music community, continuing to build a following as a performer.

In 1929, she began performing with Joe McCoy, a blues guitarist, and the two were discovered by a talent scout for Columbia Records outside a barber shop. The duo went to New York City for their first recording sessions and were bestowed the new stage names of Memphis Minnie and Kansas Joe by a Columbia A&R representative. Over the next two decades, Memphis Minnie went on to record some of the most influential blues

songs of the century, including “Bumble Bee,” “When the Levee Breaks,” and “Me and My Chauffeur Blues.” Her musical transition from the Delta blues style of open-tuned fingerpicking* on an acoustic guitar to electric guitar arrangements with bass and drum accompaniments represented an early breakthrough in the Chicago blues genre. Ahead of her time, she was one of the first highly visible women musicians to write and perform her own songs, influencing countless musicians in later years, including Big Mama Thornton, Muddy Waters, Chuck Berry, and Bonnie Raitt.

Minnie continued to record into the 1950s until her health began to suffer. She returned to Memphis in 1957 after she retired from her musical career. To this day, she is remembered for her early electric guitar experimentation and technological innovation; the techniques she developed would be adopted by Big Mama Thornton, Elvis Presley, Jo Ann Kelly, and many other prominent musicians.

* Plucking strings that are tuned, not fretted, to form a chord.



Viola. Smith

NOVEMBER 29, 1912 –

Originally hailing from Mount Calvary, Wisconsin, Viola Smith is one of the first female professional drummers in history. She is best known for her work with the all-girl orchestra, the Coquettes. As a child, she and her seven sisters were instructed by their father to learn an instrument. As the youngest, Viola's options were limited, but luckily none of her sisters had been drawn to the drums. When she was twelve, Viola and her sisters performed together, traveling around the Midwest with another all-female band. She enjoyed her big break when she and her sisters played on the *Major Bowes Amateur Hour* radio show in 1936.

In 1938, Viola and her sister Mildred started up the Coquettes, one of the first all-female orchestra groups. Viola wrote an article for *Down Beat* magazine in 1941 on the subject of prejudice against "girl musicians." After the Coquettes disbanded the following year, Viola moved to New York, where she took lessons from Billy Gladstone and several Juilliard professors. She also joined Phil Spitalny's Hour of Charm Orchestra. In 1949, she played at the inauguration celebration for President Harry S. Truman at the National Guard Armory in Washington, D.C., along

with Count Basie, Phil Spitalny, Benny Goodman, and Duke Ellington's orchestras. She gained the nickname of "the female Gene Krupa," bestowed by fellow musicians impressed with Viola's talent.

Throughout her career, Viola played in a variety of bands, including the NBC Symphony Orchestra; the National Symphony Orchestra; her own band, Viola and her Seventeen Drums; and the Kit Kat Band. Her signature drum setup included thirteen drums with two sixteen-inch tom-toms at shoulder height. She turned 105 in 2017 and as far as we know, she's still drumming away in Costa Mesa, California.



SISTER ROSETTA THARPE

MARCH 20, 1915–OCTOBER 9, 1973

Sister Rosetta Tharpe was a pioneer of mid-twentieth century music, meshing spiritual lyrics, blues melodies, and rhythmic guitar work in a unique style that was a preamble of sorts to modern rock 'n' roll. Born in Cotton Plant, Arkansas, she grew up with musical parents; her father was a singer, and her mother played the mandolin. Her mother was also an evangelist and preacher for the family's local Baptist church. As a young musical prodigy, Rosetta was encouraged by her mother to sing and play the guitar at the early age of four. When she turned six, she left Cotton Plant with her mother, who sought a better life in Chicago. After settling in the Windy City, Rosetta and her mother began attending the Roberts Temple Church of God in Christ, which was home to an urban community of musicians who exposed Rosetta to the blues and jazz genres. As she grew older, she gained a nationwide audience through her local and traveling church performances.

At nineteen, Rosetta married the preacher Thomas Thorpe, who often relied on her as the opening act for his sermons. After a few years, Rosetta divorced Thomas and moved with her mother to New York City, but decided to use a variation of her married surname for her new stage persona, Sister Rosetta Tharpe. She soon began playing at Harlem's Cotton Club, performing a mixture of upbeat gospel, jazz, rhythm and blues, and big-band music for secular audiences. While she offended some of the more

conservative churchgoers, her shows at the Cotton Club also allowed her to introduce mainstream audiences to spiritual tunes. Her recording debut with Decca Records and Lucky Millinder's jazz orchestra in 1938 led to overnight hits including "Rock Me," "That's All," and "That Lonesome Road." She became known as one of the few commercially successful gospel singers of her time, and an influential and innovative guitarist. Rosetta first started to play electric guitar in the 1940s, and completely disrupted an industry that had been heavily dominated by men.

Her personal life could also be construed as disruptive to the status quo; while she kept her relationships with women hidden from the general public, among her fellow musicians, Rosetta lived an openly queer life. In fact, she and her then-romantic partner, Marie Knight, toured and performed together in the late 1940s.

Rosetta's expert combination of swinging blues melodies and traditional folk strumming resulted in a signature playing style that made a lasting impact on the future of rock 'n' roll. Her influence can be heard in the music of artists such as Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, Aretha Franklin, and Johnny Cash. In 2017, she was posthumously selected for induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.



ÉDITH PIAF

DECEMBER 19, 1915–OCTOBER 11, 1963

Édith Giovanna Gassion, more commonly known as Édith Piaf, was a French cabaret singer, songwriter, and actress who, against all odds, grew to become France's most beloved and celebrated chanteuse. She was born in Belleville, a working-class district of Paris, to Louis Alphonse Gassion, a street acrobatic performer, and Annetta Giovanna Maillard, a café singer, who abandoned Édith at birth. She was primarily raised by her paternal grandmother, the madam of a bordello in Normandy, after her father enlisted with the French army to fight in World War I.

Édith experienced temporary blindness from the ages of three to seven as a side effect of keratitis, an inflammation of the cornea. To aid in her recovery, Édith's grandmother and the working girls from her bordello raised the funds to make a religious pilgrimage to Lisieux to visit the grave of Saint Thérèse. When Édith recovered her sense of sight after the pilgrimage, she became a lifelong devotee of Catholicism, praying nightly for the rest of her life.

At age seven, Édith joined her father and his troupe of local street performers, and she began to sing in public. By her teenage years, she was independently supporting herself, often singing for coins on the streets of Pigalle.

At seventeen, Édith gave birth to her only child, Marcelle, who died of meningitis at age two.

When Édith was twenty, she was discovered by nightclub owner Louis Leplée, who took her under his wing and became her first manager. Due to her timid demeanor and petite form, he nicknamed her "*La Môme Piaf*," French slang for "the little sparrow." He taught Édith the fundamentals of performance and stage presence and directed her to wear a black dress during performances, which she continued to do for the rest of her career. Under Leplée's guidance and with his promotional support, Édith began to grow a local following after her debut performance in 1935. In the following year, Leplée was murdered, and Édith was briefly investigated as a potential accomplice due to their association. She managed to escape the scandal after teaming up with Raymond Asso, her new manager, mentor, and lyricist, along with the composer Marguerite Monnot. Together, the three developed songs reminiscent of the *chanson française*—lyric-driven pop compositions that follow the natural rhythm of the French language. During World War II, Édith became one of the most well-known French performers. Upon being invited to perform in Germany, she insisted that French prisoners of war also be allowed to watch her sing—to which the



German soldiers reluctantly agreed. Following the war, her fame skyrocketed, and she began to tour throughout the United States, Europe, and South America, playing venues like Carnegie Hall and *The Ed Sullivan Show*.

Édith's songs took lyrical inspiration from her own life—they often leaned toward the tragic. Although she married twice and enjoyed many romances throughout her short life, she often claimed that middleweight boxer

Marcel Cerdan was her truest love. In 1949, he was killed in a plane crash while en route to visit her in Paris, and she recorded "L'hymne à l'amour" the following year in his memory.

Édith continued to perform and record music until 1963, when she fell ill with liver cancer. She passed away in October of that year, at the age of forty-seven, in her villa on the French Riviera.

“You put a bunch of musicians behind a curtain, and who’s gonna tell me who’s the female playing or who’s the male playing? You can’t do that. The music is the thing. That’s the important thing.”

—CARLINE RAY

VIOLETA PARRA

OCTOBER 4, 1917–FEBRUARY 5, 1967

Often credited as “the mother of Latin American folk music,” Violeta del Carmen Parra Sandoval was a Chilean composer, songwriter, ethnomusicologist, visual artist, and folklorist, known as one of the founders of the *Nueva Canción* (“New Song”) movement. Violeta was born to a large, musical family in the rural Chilean province of Ñuble. Her father, a music teacher, taught her to play the guitar and sing as a child. After he died in 1929, Violeta moved to Santiago to live with her relatives and attend school.

In 1938, Violeta married Luis Cereceda, a train engineer, whose Communist beliefs greatly influenced Violeta’s own political ideas and activist inclinations. They had two children together, but their marriage ended a decade later. Despite his radical beliefs, Luis expected Violeta to give up her ambitions of becoming a professional musician; Violeta refused. She began to write her own songs and perform with her sister as *Las Hermanas Parra* (“the Parra sisters”) at venues all over the city, gradually gaining a dedicated following. In 1949, she married Luis Arce, a furniture maker, with whom she had two more daughters.

After several years of performing, Violeta left *Las Hermanas Parra* in 1952 at the encouragement of her

brother, the poet Nicanor Parra, to begin collecting and preserving folk music from all over Chile. This was the inspiration for the *Nueva Canción* movement, a folk revival that celebrated the socially, politically, and economically marginalized people of Latin America and their struggle for social justice in a classist, elitist society. As a result of her tireless effort to archive the cultural abundance of her native Chile, Violeta was awarded the Caupolicán prize for Folk Singer of the Year in 1954, and she was invited to represent Chile at the World Festival of Youth and Students in Poland that same year. She went on to perform throughout Europe, living in France for two years and recording several albums there before returning to Chile in 1956.

In addition to her political activism and ethnographic work, Parra also painted, wrote poetry, sculpted, and created *arpilleras* (folk tapestries); she was the first Latin American artist to have a solo exhibition at the Louvre Museum in Paris. She tragically died by suicide at forty-nine years old, but Violeta’s historical and musical legacy lives on to this day. Her original song, “*Gracias a la Vida*” (“Thanks to Life”), composed by Parra in 1966, is one of the most covered Latin American songs of the past fifty years.



Chavela VARGAS

APRIL 17, 1919–AUGUST 5, 2012

Isabel Vargas Lizano, better known as Chavela Vargas, was a Costa Rican singer and guitarist who forever changed the image of *ranchera* music with her singular vocal stylings and performances. Born in San Joaquín de Flores, Chavela began singing at eight years old, finding the creative outlet during what was a difficult and often solitary childhood. After her parents divorced, she was sent to live with her aunt and uncle—a significant life event at fourteen, causing intense feelings of abandonment, rage, and heartbreak. (This early sadness in life would later resurface in her dark, aggressive stylings and technique as a vocalist.) At seventeen, Chavela moved to Mexico City, where she began singing and performing in local cantinas and clubs. She broke the gender mold of the traditional *ranchera* singer, donning pants and a *jorongo*, a full-length woven poncho, rather than the ribbons and hoop skirts of her female peers, and performing love songs directed to a female audience. After one of her performances, she met the noted composer José Alfredo Jiménez, and they soon struck up a fortuitous partnership. Chavela went on to interpret many of José's compositions, his melancholy writing style flawlessly meshing with her raw, emotive vocal renditions.

As the two began to perform together around Mexico City, Chavela began to drink excessively—a habit encouraged by her intense stage fright as well as the *machismo* culture of the local music scene. Initially she built a reputation at smaller bohemian venues through her work with

José; but, as one of the first female singers of *ranchera* music, she struggled to find opportunities at larger theaters.

Early on in her career, Chavela was known for her seductive and infectious charm, and she enjoyed romantic affairs with the likes of Frida Kahlo, Ava Gardner, and even some of the wives of the politicians who would come to watch her perform. In the early 1960s, she was dealt a crushing blow when José, her mentor, died from complications of cirrhosis. Chavela retreated from the public eye and relocated to Tepoztlán, Mexico, struggling with alcoholism and fighting with her record label, Orfeón, which had allegedly embezzled a large portion of her record sales over the years. Eventually, with the help of her lawyer and some time spent with local shamans, she finally overcame these issues and made a ceremonious return to the stage at El Hábito cabaret in the early 1990s. It was, reportedly, her very first performance without the aid of tequila.

In 1992, soon after her reappearance on the stage, she traveled to Spain at the invitation of writer Manuel Arroyo, and was finally welcomed on the larger stages of theaters abroad. During this time, she openly embraced her identity as a lesbian, and encouraged her audiences to fight for acceptance and understanding. Chavela continued to perform for twenty years before she passed away from heart failure in 2012, departing with the final words, “I go with Mexico in my heart.” Considered an icon of Mexican LGBTQ history, Chavela left a legacy of hope, bravery, and fearlessness.



HAZEL SCOTT

JUNE 11, 1920–OCTOBER 2, 1981

Hazel Dorothy Scott was a Trinidadian-American jazz pianist, singer, actress and civil-rights activist. Born in Port of Spain, Hazel was raised by a college professor father and a classically trained pianist mother, who brought her to New York City after separating from Hazel's father. They settled in Harlem, where Hazel's mother and grandmother fostered her budding musical talents; she possessed perfect pitch and was already confidently playing the piano at age four. She was hailed as a child prodigy by Paul Wagner, a Juilliard professor who began teaching and mentoring Hazel from the age of eight onward. As a teenager, she joined her mother's all-female jazz band as a pianist and trumpet player, and her talents were soon noticed during the band's performances throughout New York and surrounding cities. By eighteen, she was performing and hosting radio programs for the Mutual Broadcasting System and making appearances on Broadway, gaining popularity for her swinging classical style of piano playing. An extremely versatile instrumentalist, Hazel played jazz, blues, popular, and classical music at various venues and nightclubs, including the downtown club Café Society. Hazel also broke barriers by being one of the first Afro-Caribbean women to appear in major Hollywood films, and she was the first black performer to host her own nationally syndicated television show.

Hazel was also a strong voice for civil rights and an advocate for racial justice. She refused to perform for segregated audiences, and demanded final cut privileges and

control over her wardrobe in films. In 1949, she successfully sued the owners of a restaurant in Pasco, Washington, on the grounds of racial discrimination. With the advent of the Red Scare and McCarthyism in the entertainment industry during the 1950s, Hazel was branded a Communist sympathizer in a conservative publication due to her vocal support for Benjamin J. Davis, a Harlem-based Communist candidate for city council, and frequent appearances at Café Society, a rumored Communist meeting place. The controversy resulted in the cancellation of *The Hazel Scott Show*, and Scott began to experience difficulties with booking new concerts in the United States. Despite these hardships, Hazel continued releasing albums, including *Relaxed Piano Moods*, which featured Charles Mingus and Max Roach, and is widely considered one of the most influential jazz records of the twentieth century. She moved to Paris in the late 1950s to avoid continued political antagonism, joining fellow black expatriates like James Baldwin, Mary Lou Williams, and Dizzy Gillespie. During her time there, she remained an outspoken critic of McCarthyism and its reactionary tactics.

Hazel returned to the United States in 1967, resuming her television career and performing in New York clubs until she fell ill with pancreatic cancer and passed away in 1981. She leaves behind a legacy not only as one of the twentieth century's most vibrant and technically skilled performers, but as an unapologetic rule-breaker and champion of social justice.



Mary Ford

JULY 7, 1924–SEPTEMBER 30, 1977

Mary Ford was a multitalented guitarist, actress, and singer whose legacy is often overshadowed by that of her onetime husband and musical collaborator, Les Paul, the inventor of the solid-body electric guitar. But while Les Paul's work as a guitarist and luthier made him a cornerstone of American music history, it was Mary Ford who helped him reach pop stardom and achieve true innovation in recording technique.

Mary grew up as Iris Colleen Summers in El Monte, California. She got an early musical start singing gospel hymns in Nazarene churches and performing on the local Pasadena Christian radio station with her siblings. During her teenage years, she began performing professionally as one of the Sunshine Girls, a vocal trio that backed country singer Jimmy Wakely.

In 1945, Mary was introduced to the guitarist Les Paul, and she left her post in the Sunshine Girls the following year to join Les and his band. She soon adopted her new stage name, Mary Ford, to mark her transition from background country vocalist to vanguard pop musician. Mary and Paul married in 1949 and went on to record some of the most innovative duets of their time, using the new

method of multitrack recording to allow Ford to harmonize with her own voice, along with the technique of close miking to create more intimate-sounding vocals. Some of their most successful hits of the 1950s included "How High the Moon," "Vaya con Dios," and "Mockin' Bird Hill." At the height of their fame, the duo performed at venues like Carnegie Hall and the Eisenhower White House, and in their first concert abroad they appeared before Queen Elizabeth II and the royal family at the Palladium theater in London.

Once rock 'n' roll began to dominate the charts, Les Paul and Mary Ford's popularity slowly began to fade. Following their separation in 1962, Les and Mary ultimately divorced in 1964. Mary continued to perform with her sisters semiregularly for the rest of her life before succumbing to complications of diabetes at the age of fifty-three.



CARLINE RAY

APRIL 21, 1925–JULY 18, 2013

A pioneering jazz instrumentalist and vocalist with a career spanning seven decades, Carline Ray, born in Harlem during the height of the Harlem Renaissance, was an unmistakable force in twentieth-century music history. Carline's father was a Juilliard graduate and horn player who took a job with the post office to earn steady income for the family. Carline seemed to inherit the musical gene; she attended Juilliard at the age of sixteen, earning a degree in composition five years later. Right after graduating, she joined the International Sweethearts of Rhythm, America's first all-female, racially integrated jazz band, as a rhythm guitarist and vocalist. Ray later found additional success in smaller ensembles, working with musical icons like Erskine Hawkins, Leonard Bernstein, Mary Lou Williams, and Bobby Darin. She received a master's degree from the Manhattan School of Music in 1956, and married Luis Russell, a fellow musician, the same year.

After her husband's death in 1963, Carline continued playing bass and singing vocals in her new career as a session musician, performing at women's jazz festivals and mentoring younger female musicians. Her work as a session musician spanned countless genres beyond jazz,

including choral works, gospel, blues, and more. Just as her own father had done, Carline passed her love of music-making on to her daughter, Catherine Russell, with whom she often collaborated later in life. In 1997, Carline helped form the all-female group Jazzberry Jam with pianist Bertha Hope and percussionist Paula Hampton. Carline remained an active and versatile professional performer right up until the year of her death at the age of eighty-eight.



TOSHIKO AKIYOSHI

DECEMBER 12, 1929 –

Toshiko Akiyoshi is an award-winning, Grammy-nominated Japanese jazz composer, arranger, bandleader, and pianist with a career spanning more than six decades. Born in Manchuria, Toshiko started playing the piano at age six, and later moved back to Japan with her parents after the end of World War II when they lost their home. She first stumbled upon jazz when a Japanese record collector played one of Teddy Wilson's records for her. Enthralled, she immediately began her own study of the genre.

In 1952, American pianist Oscar Peterson happened to catch Toshiko performing at a club on the Ginza strip in Tokyo. He persuaded his producer Norman Granz to record her first album, released in both the United States and Japan. A few years later, in 1956, she became the first Japanese student to be enrolled at the Berklee College of Music. In 1959, Toshiko married jazz saxophonist Charlie Mariano. (Their daughter is the musician Monday Michiru.) Toshiko and Charlie collaborated on many projects together, but they ultimately divorced in 1967. She married her second husband, saxophonist and flutist Lew Tabackin, two years later.

Toshiko and Lew formed their first big band after moving to Los Angeles in 1972. The second iteration of their big band group, the Toshiko Akiyoshi Jazz Orchestra, went on to tour and record to great critical acclaim.

Toshiko still performs, primarily as a solo pianist, and has continued to work as a bandleader and arranger into her eighties. Inspired by Duke Ellington's choice to reflect his own culture in his music, Toshiko has brought Japanese instrumentation and harmonies into her compositions and arrangements. In 2007, she won the National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Master award, which is the highest American honor bestowed upon top jazz artists.



ODETTA — — HOLMES

DECEMBER 31, 1930–DECEMBER 2, 2008

Odetta Holmes, often referred to as “the voice of the civil-rights movement,” was an American folk and blues singer, songwriter, guitarist, and civil-rights activist. She was born in Birmingham, Alabama, during the beginnings of the Great Depression. The soulful, emotional work and liberation songs of the era made a significant impact on Odetta during her time in the South, and she drew inspiration from musicians like Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith. In 1937, after her father passed away, Odetta and her mother moved to Los Angeles. During the journey from Alabama to California, a conductor forced all black passengers on her train (including herself and her mother) to move into a designated car for “colored people.”

In elementary school, a teacher noticed her singing voice, and encouraged her mother to enroll Odetta in classical voice training. Odetta studied voice for several years, joining a prestigious singing group in junior high school, starring in musical theater shows, and receiving a degree in music from Los Angeles City College. In 1950, she went on tour with the traveling *Finian's Rainbow* production as part of the chorus. During a stop in San Francisco, she stumbled across a folk music performance at a coffeehouse in the North Beach district, and immediately felt the emotional and historical pull of the genre, echoing the songs she had heard during her childhood in the South. She soon left the *Finian's Rainbow* production and moved to San Francisco, landing a job as a folk club singer, learning guitar along the way.

In the years following, Odetta began to make a name for herself in both the Bay Area and New York City through her performances and studio albums, including the 1956 release *Odetta Sings Ballads and Blues* and the 1957 release *At the Gate of Horn*. These two albums showcased Odetta's versatile and compelling contralto, paired beautifully with an intimate acoustic guitar instrumentation. Bob Dylan, Rosa Parks, Harry Belafonte, Joan Baez, and Janis Joplin all cited Odetta as a pivotal influence, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. referred to her as “the queen of American folk music.”

In the 1960s, Odetta began to perform at political rallies and demonstrations on behalf of the civil-rights movement. She performed from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial during the 1963 March on Washington and marched alongside Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. for voting rights in Selma, Alabama in 1965. Odetta released over a dozen albums throughout the decade, exploring varied instrumentation and recording a mixture of her own songs, covers of popular compositions, and traditional folk, jazz, blues, and spiritual tunes.

In 1999, Odetta was awarded the National Medal of Arts, and she was a Kennedy Center honoree in 2004. She continued performing up until months before her death in 2008, sadly passing away before she could realize her dream of performing at Barack Obama's presidential inauguration.



MIRIAM MAKEBA

MARCH 4, 1932–NOVEMBER 10, 2008

Zenzile Miriam Makeba, known to most of the world as Mama Africa, was a South African singer-songwriter, civil-rights and anti-apartheid activist, actress, and UN goodwill ambassador who was one of the first musicians to bring African music to a worldwide audience. Miriam was born in the Prospect township near Johannesburg to a domestic worker mother and an educator father. Her father passed away when she was six years old. In order to help support her family, she found employment as a nanny, living in Pretoria with her grandmother and cousins, while her mother worked for families in Johannesburg. As a child, Miriam was influenced by her family's interest in music; her brother collected records and taught her songs, her mother played several traditional instruments, and her father had played piano. She first got her start singing in the Kilnerton Training Institute choir, learning to sing in English before she could speak the language, in addition to the Xhosa, Sotho, and Zulu languages.

Between the ages of seventeen and nineteen, Miriam endured a turbulent, abusive marriage, became a mother, and was diagnosed with breast cancer, which she successfully overcame. After being abandoned by her husband, she began singing professionally in order to support her daughter, performing a variety of American and South African covers in the *mbube* style, a South African vocalization technique that is characterized by homophonic singing in unified rhythm. Miriam got started singing with the

Cuban Brothers and the Manhattan Brothers before joining Gallotone Records' all-woman group, the Skylarks, in 1956. The group began to receive praise for their harmonies. That same year, Gallotone Records released "Lovely Eyes," Miriam's first solo recording, which became the first South African record to successfully break the U.S. Billboard Top 100. In 1959, she performed in *Come Back, Africa*, an American-produced anti-apartheid film. Miriam gained international recognition with her appearance in this film, and she traveled abroad for the first time to perform in London and New York, moving to New York City later that year. In London, she met Harry Belafonte, who quickly took her under his wing as his protégée and helped her with some of her early solo recordings, including "Pata Pata" and "Qongqothwane."

After learning of the deaths of her mother and two of her uncles in 1960, Miriam discovered that her passport had been canceled when she tried to return to South Africa for the funeral. This experience, along with her concern for her surviving South African family members, motivated her to speak out against apartheid and advocate for civil rights. She soon found herself in the same social circles as outspoken musicians Nina Simone and Ray Charles, African-American actress Cicely Tyson, and the activist Stokely Carmichael, founder of the Black Power movement, who Miriam met on a trip to Guinea. Miriam and Stokely married in 1968 and relocated to Guinea,



where she was appointed the country's official delegate to the United Nations. Miriam was subsequently branded a radical extremist by conservative forces in America. She and Stokely divorced in 1978.

Miriam continued to write and perform music for many decades, remaining a highly visible advocate for

civil rights and social justice. She eventually returned to her native South Africa in 1990 at the behest of Nelson Mandela, and in her final years, she worked closely with the Mandelas to advocate for marginalized communities in the region. She died on November 10, 2008, following a farewell tour concert in Naples, Italy.

“Music was my passion. It fed, and connected me, to everything. . . . the fact that I had to dig down deep and persevere through every challenge and indignity—learning American music as a Filipina-American outsider—that has led me to where I am and how I play today.”

—JUNE MILLINGTON

NINA SIMONE

FEBRUARY 21, 1933–APRIL 21, 2003

Nina Simone was an American singer, songwriter, pianist, arranger, performer, and civil-rights activist who worked across several genres during her decades-long career. Born Eunice Waymon and raised as one of eight children in Tryon, North Carolina, Nina started playing piano at age three. She continued developing her talent by performing at her family's local church, where her mother preached as a Methodist minister. Throughout her childhood and early adolescence, Nina studied tirelessly, practicing seven to eight hours a day, with the goal of becoming the first black woman to be a professional classical pianist in America. She took lessons from Muriel Mazzanovich, a local churchgoer, who later assisted Nina in securing funds for her musical education. Muriel introduced Nina to classical composers like Bach, Beethoven, Debussy, and Brahms, whose music made a lasting impression on Nina's playing for the rest of her life.

After being denied entry to the Curtis Institute of Music, Nina worked a number of odd jobs and taught piano in Philadelphia to financially support herself and her family. In 1954, she became a regular performer at the Midtown Bar & Grill in Atlantic City, where she first began to sing. It was around that time she adopted the stage name of Nina Simone to protect her identity, knowing her religious mother would disapprove of her performing "the devil's music."

After being discovered by Syd Nathan of Bethlehem Records, Nina released her first Billboard hit—a unique interpretation of "I Loves You, Porgy" from *Porgy and Bess*. In 1960, she performed at the Newport Jazz Festival for the first time at the behest of George Wein, one of the event's cofounders. As a performer, Nina stood out from her peers as a musician impossible to categorize; her deep contralto voice defied common expectations of the typical female jazz singer timbre, and her repertoire included everything from Duke Ellington to Bob Dylan, traditional folk to classical compositions. Her performance style and demeanor eventually earned Nina the nickname "the High Priestess of Soul."

In 1961, Nina married New York police detective Andrew Stroud, who soon quit his job to manage her promising career. With his business savvy and wealth of connections, Andrew helped arrange Nina's debut performance at Carnegie Hall in 1963, one of her lifelong goals. This concert rocketed her to international fame. While all signs pointed toward success, the performer privately battled bipolar disorder and depression, exacerbated by overwork, as well as Andrew's mismanagement and physically abusive behavior.

Beginning with her original 1964 song in response to the murder of Medgar Evers and the Birmingham bombing, "Mississippi Goddam," Nina's voice amplified the



racial injustices of her time. She became one of the first high-profile musicians to publicly address racial inequality in her performances, and she continued writing racially conscious songs throughout the civil-rights era, including “Young, Gifted and Black” and “Four Women.” Her circle of friends included activists, writers, and social justice heroes like Lorraine Hansberry, James Baldwin, Betty Shabazz, and Langston Hughes.

After battling breast cancer, Nina passed away at the age of seventy in her adopted home of Carry-le-Rouet, France. Her funeral was attended by Miriam Makeba and Patti LaBelle, among hundreds of mourners. The influence of Nina’s musical legacy can be heard in the songs of performers like Aretha Franklin, Lauryn Hill, Beyoncé, Fiona Apple, and Alicia Keys. She was posthumously inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2018.

**“A note doesn’t have sex to it.
you either play it good or you
don’t play it good.”**

—CAROL KAYE

carol kaye

MARCH 24, 1935 –

Few people know her by name, but Carol Kaye is one of the most widely heard bass players in the history of recorded music. She was born to musician parents in Everett, Washington, in the height of the Depression, and began working at nine years old to help support her mother after her father abandoned them. Inspired by her mother's piano playing from a young age, Carol began playing guitar at the age of thirteen. After her family relocated to Los Angeles, she started playing bebop jazz guitar in various groups at Los Angeles nightclubs.

In 1957, Carol, by then a twenty-two-year-old divorced mother of two, made her accidental break into studio work. Producer Robert "Bumps" Blackwell asked Carol to provide guitar fills during a Sam Cooke recording session, and she quickly became a first-choice session player in the recording, film, and commercial audio communities. She made the most of this new career as a session guitarist for the next five years, picking up gigs to supplement income from her day job as a technical typist. And then, in 1963, she transitioned to the Fender Precision bass as her main instrument. On her bass, Carol used her technical foundations to create a jazz-inspired signature sound, by using flatwound strings* on the instrument and plucking them with a pick. Soon enough, Carol became the number-one session bass player in Los Angeles, and was able to quit her day job and support herself, her three children, her mother, and a live-in nanny on her music earnings.

Later, Carol became the sole female member of the Wrecking Crew, an elite group of LA session musicians who played with some of the most beloved American pop performers throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The Wrecking Crew would often work twelve- to fifteen-hour days, sometimes recording three or four full records per day. Carol and her Fender Precision bass made appearances on records by the Beach Boys, Sam Cooke, Ray Charles, Simon & Garfunkel, Sonny & Cher, Quincy Jones, and countless others. Aside from her extensive rock and pop recording work, Carol Kaye also wrote countless musical scores for television and film, including *Mission: Impossible*, *Forrest Gump*, *La Bamba*, *M*A*S*H*, and *Hawaii Five-O*.

Toward the end of the 1960s, she formally stepped away from full-time session work and began writing teaching materials, including the essential book *How to Play the Electric Bass*, released in 1969. Now in her eighties, Carol still teaches bass and guitar online to professional musicians from her home in Rosamond, California.

* In contrast to roundwound strings, flatwound strings are guitar strings wound with flat wire. The different shape creates a darker tone and provides a smoother touch that results in less noise while sliding up and down the guitar and fingering the frets. These strings are often preferred by jazz players in particular.



Sylvia Robinson

MAY 29, 1935–SEPTEMBER 29, 2011

Sylvia Robinson, the “Mother of Hip-Hop,” was an American singer, guitarist, record producer, and label executive who brought rap and hip-hop into the commercial music world. She was born Sylvia Vanterpool, growing up in Harlem in New York City. She began singing at eleven years old, learning alongside her opera-singer sister Audrey. At fourteen, Sylvia dropped out of high school. She got her first break with Columbia Records in 1950 as a blues singer, and landed her first rhythm-and-blues hit with Savoy Records’ “Little Boy (You’re Gonna Be Sorry)” by the age of sixteen. Sylvia soon met MacHouston “Mickey” Baker, a session guitar player for Savoy Records, who became her guitar teacher and eventual performing partner. The two performed as Mickey & Sylvia throughout the 1950s, achieving a top-twenty hit with Sylvia’s “Love Is Strange” in 1956.

In 1959, Sylvia met Joseph Robinson, a bar owner and budding entrepreneur. The two soon married, had children, moved to New Jersey, and started building All Platinum Records, a soul-focused label. The label helped artists like Lezli Valentine, the Moments, and Shirley & Company score some of their first hits, often cowritten and produced by Sylvia. In 1972, she decided to record and perform her own song “Pillow Talk” after it was turned down by Al Green based on his religious beliefs. The single reached number one on the rhythm-and-blues chart and number three on Billboard’s Hot 100.

In the late 1970s, Sylvia and Joseph formed the new Sugar Hill Records label, named for the Sugar Hill

neighborhood in Harlem. Plagued by financial and legal troubles, the couple nearly went bankrupt until Sylvia had an epiphany upon watching DJ Lovebug Starski rapping over instrumental breaks in the disco tracks he was spinning at the Harlem World nightclub one evening. She tasked her son Joey to be her personal talent scout, and the two of them discovered local rappers Michael “Wonder Mike” Wright, Henry “Big Bank Hank” Jackson, and Guy “Master Gee” O’Brien, who all auditioned outside a pizza joint in Englewood, New Jersey. Sylvia named the trio the Sugarhill Gang, and the group went on to record “Rapper’s Delight” in a single fourteen-minute take, cued in by Sylvia pointing at each of them during the session.

This single, along with Sylvia’s foresight and determination, revolutionized the commercial music landscape and formally introduced the world to rap and hip-hop. Following on this breakthrough success, the group Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five released *The Message*, a seminal, politically driven rap record among the first to include samples of street noise and scratching, on Sugar Hill Records in 1982. Although the Sugar Hill Records label folded in the mid-1980s due to the pressures of competition and ongoing legal battles, Sylvia is still remembered for her visionary producing and songwriting, her business savvy, and for ushering hip-hop and rap into the mainstream. She died in 2011 of congestive heart failure; her eldest son, Leland Robinson Sr., now manages Sugar Hill Music’s licensing and publishing deals.



peggy jones

JULY 19, 1940–SEPTEMBER 16, 2015

Peggy Jones, often known by her stage name “Lady Bo,” was one of the first female lead guitarists and vocalists in a mainstream rock band. Born in the Sugar Hill neighborhood of Harlem, New York (also the future home of Sylvia Robinson’s Sugar Hill Records label), Peggy was interested in music from a young age, growing up with musical parents who encouraged her artistic development. She grew up listening to Billie Holiday, Sam Cooke, Lena Horne, and B.B. King. At age twelve, Peggy learned the ukulele to accompany herself during vocal practice. She attended the High School of Performing Arts, where she studied tap dancing, ballet, and opera. After seeing Mickey Baker and Sylvia Robinson perform at the Apollo Theater when she was fifteen years old, Peggy purchased her first guitar and began developing her unique style of blues playing.

Peggy first met Bo Diddley walking down 125th Street in Harlem with her guitar on her way to a recording session. This chance encounter in 1956 led to an impromptu jam session in Bo’s dressing room at the Apollo, and in 1957 she assumed the role of full-time lead guitarist in his band, replacing the recently drafted Jody Williams. During her time in Bo’s band, she learned how to play in

his distinctive open tuning style (a method common in blues and folk music where the strings are tuned to form a chord), and her inventive use of pedal effects contributed greatly to her personal approach to playing. Peggy and Bo Diddley each created some of their best work in their collaboration, often trading off lead and rhythm parts effortlessly within the same song.

In 1961, Peggy left Bo Diddley’s band to focus on her new band, the Jewels, but she rejoined Bo in 1970 to great acclaim. Throughout her career, she explored the funk and soul genres and maintained a progressive and experimental mindset with regard to her choice of instrumentation and special effects. She was one of the early adopters of the Roland guitar synthesizer, a device not often found outside the progressive rock genre. Peggy performed through her seventies, right up until her death in 2015. She is remembered as one of the premier rock guitarists and vocalists of her time.



Buffy Sainte-Marie

FEBRUARY 20, 1941–

Buffy Sainte-Marie is an award-winning Canadian singer-songwriter, musician, visual artist, activist, educator, and icon of the North American folk movement of the 1960s. She was born on the Piapot Plains Cree First Nation Reserve in Saskatchewan, Canada. Orphaned as a baby, Buffy was adopted by Albert and Winifred Sainte-Marie, and grew up in Massachusetts. She was musically inclined from a young age, teaching herself to play piano at the age of three and beginning to write her first songs in the following year. At sixteen she taught herself how to play the guitar, and she would often make trips back to the Piapot Reserve to connect more deeply with her indigenous Cree heritage.

When Buffy attended the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, she began playing songs for her dormmates. The housemother of Buffy's dorm encouraged her to study musicians from other parts of the world, from Édith Piaf to Carmen Amaya. Buffy's continued passion for writing and performing music found an outlet in the burgeoning folk music scene. In the early 1960s, the self-taught pianist and guitarist became a well-known figure among audiences in Toronto's Yorkville district and in Greenwich Village in New York City, making waves with her outspoken political and environmentally conscious songs like "Universal Soldier" and "Now That the Buffalo's Gone."

She began touring throughout the United States, Canada, and abroad, often performing with emerging

artists of the time like Leonard Cohen, Neil Young, and Joni Mitchell. In 1964, Buffy released her debut album *It's My Way!* It was not an immediate commercial success, but it proved extremely influential within the folk music community.

At the height of the civil-rights movement, Buffy was an active and passionate advocate for the Native American community. She opened the Nihewan Foundation for Native American Education in 1969 to promote the education of Native American students and to broaden awareness of Native American culture. She was blacklisted by the American government in the 1970s, along with many of her peers in the entertainment industry, for speaking out against the Vietnam War. She was also a passionate advocate for women's rights, making a groundbreaking appearance on *Sesame Street* in 1977 where she breastfed her son Cody.

Throughout her career, Buffy has consistently used music as a platform to engage in political activism. She continues to bring awareness to the plight of indigenous peoples, and to fight for feminist causes. In 1997, she was made an Officer of the Order of Canada, the country's second highest honor for merit. She continues to perform and record new music; her most recent album, *Medicine Songs*, was released in 2017.



Carole King

FEBRUARY 9, 1942–

Carole King is one of America's most successful, prolific, and beloved singer-songwriters. She has written or cowritten over four hundred songs, recorded by more than one thousand artists. Born as Carol Joan Klein in 1942, she grew up in a Jewish family in Manhattan. From a young age, Carole had a powerful curiosity about music; she studied music theory, notation, timing, and piano techniques with her mother, Eugenia. At four, her mother discovered that Carole had perfect pitch—the ability to spontaneously recreate a musical note without hearing it.

In high school, Carole founded a band called the Co-Sines and chose King as her new stage surname. In 1958, she began studying at Queens College, where she first met fellow songwriter and future husband Gerry Goffin. She went on to form a romantic and professional songwriting partnership with Gerry, and the two married in 1959 after finding out Carole was pregnant. Gerry and Carole spent their days working as an assistant chemist and secretary respectively, and their nights writing songs together. They first made the charts in 1960 with the Shirelles' Billboard number-one hit single, "Will You Love Me Tomorrow." The duo continued writing songs for a

variety of performers into the 1960s, including "Up on the Roof" for the Drifters, "One Fine Day" for the Chiffons, and "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman" for Aretha Franklin.

After Gerry and Carole divorced in 1968, Carole moved to the Laurel Canyon neighborhood of Los Angeles to revive her own recording ambitions, and began collaborations with artists like James Taylor and Joni Mitchell. Her first solo album, *Writer*, released in 1970, reached number eighty-four on Billboard's Top 200 chart. But it was her second solo album, *Tapestry*, released in 1971, that finally brought her mainstream success. It featured hit singles like "It's Too Late" and "You've Got a Friend," as well as new interpretations of her classic songs from the 1960s. It was the very first album by a female performer to reach Diamond status, meaning it had sold over ten million copies.

Carole has since released twenty-five solo albums, won four Grammy awards, and has been inducted into both the Songwriters Hall of Fame and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.



A-R-E-T-H-A F-R-A-N-K-L-I-N

MARCH 25, 1942–AUGUST 16, 2018

Aretha Louise Franklin is one of the most influential and iconic American singer-songwriters in American history. She was born in Memphis, Tennessee. Her gospel-singer mother and itinerant-preacher father soon settled the family in Detroit, Michigan, where her father assumed the role of pastor at the New Bethel church. As a child, Aretha's inclination toward music was strong; she learned to sing and play piano by ear. After her mother's sudden death in 1952, Aretha began singing solos at New Bethel in front of her father's congregation. Her father, Clarence, became her manager, and the two went on the road traveling to various churches where Aretha would perform while her father preached. Clarence helped his daughter get her first deal with J.V.B. Records, which released her debut album, *Songs of Faith*, in 1956.

During one of her tours around the country, Aretha met Sam Cooke, who was a member of the Soul Stirrers at the time. He encouraged her to start recording pop music. In 1960, her demo made its way to Columbia Records; they signed her as a "five-percent artist," guaranteeing hearty royalties over the course of her five-year contract. Her first Columbia single, "Today I Sing the Blues," was released in September of that year, climbing to the top ten on the Hot Rhythm & Blues chart. In 1966, Aretha migrated to the Atlantic Records label. In her first year with Atlantic, she released her iconic cover of Otis Redding's "Respect" (which hit the number-one spot on both R&B and pop

charts), along with several other top-ten singles, including "Baby I Love You," and Carole King's "(You Make Me Feel Like A) Natural Woman." The following two years brought Aretha major commercial success; in 1968, she won the Grammy Award for Best Female R&B Vocal Performance and appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine.

Aretha's voice is characterized by remarkable flexibility, power, and range, and she is uniquely recognized for combining gospel and soul vocal styling with pop-song structures, and for skillfully interpreting the compositions of other vocalists and composers. Her musical dominance garnered her the nickname "The Queen of Soul." Aretha became a fierce spokeswoman for equality during the civil-rights movement, assisting Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. with financial support in 1967 and offering to post bond for activist Angela Davis in 1970. Since her ascent to the spotlight in the late 1960s, she has gone on to win eighteen Grammy awards. She was the first female artist inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1987, and she received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2005. In 2009, she performed at the inauguration of Barack Obama, and performed once again for the Obama family at the White House in 2015. She passed away from complications of pancreatic cancer in the summer of 2018, leaving behind a legacy of revolutionary musical success and advocacy for people of color.



JONI MITCHELL

NOVEMBER 7, 1943–

Joni Mitchell is a Canadian-American singer-songwriter regarded by many as one of the most influential and significant songwriters of her generation. Born Roberta Joan Anderson in Alberta, Canada, Joni contracted polio at a young age, and as a result she was more inclined toward creative pursuits than physical ones. In middle school, she was encouraged by a teacher to begin writing poems. Joni's early love of poetry, combined with her youthful experiments with painting, piano, and ukulele, foreshadowed her later success as a multidisciplinary artist and songwriter. She began performing locally when she got to high school, and after one year at the Alberta College of Art, she relocated to Toronto to pursue her music career wholeheartedly.

When she encountered difficulty getting booked at major folk clubs in Toronto, Joni started busking on the street and began to write original songs. She took a job in a department store in order to cover the rent. She moved to the United States after meeting Chuck Mitchell, an American folk singer, who promised Joni steady work in his home country. The two began to perform regularly at local coffeehouses in Detroit, Michigan, marrying in 1965. Two years later, Joni and Chuck separated, and she moved to New York on her own to pursue her musical career.

Some of her early songs were recorded by the likes of Buffy Sainte-Marie and Judy Collins; but Joni's big break came upon meeting David Crosby, a former member of the

Byrds; Crosby connected Joni to her soon-to-be-manager Elliot Roberts and agent David Geffen. Extensive touring for her debut album, *Song to a Seagull* (produced by David Crosby), built excitement for the release of Joni's second LP, *Clouds*, which earned the singer her first Grammy Award. Her third album, *Blue*, heavily inspired by her relationships with musicians Graham Nash and James Taylor, garnered widespread acclaim and great commercial success. The album showcased her spare style of guitar playing, emotionally driven lyricism, and visionary production direction. Throughout her musical career, Joni has pioneered an entirely new type of sound through experimental tunings, evocative lyrics, and inventive instrumentation. She embraced myriad genres from jazz to world music, collaborating with peers like Charles Mingus, Herbie Hancock, and Jaco Pastorius.

Joni's intimate and deeply personal songs explore everything, from daily life to culture and politics. Joni has perpetually rejected cultural norms and expectations, and embraced exploration to achieve complete artistic freedom. She has influenced countless artists, including Madonna, Björk, Bonnie Raitt, and Donna Summer.



DOLLY PARTON

JANUARY 19, 1946–

Dolly Parton is an American singer-songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, record producer, philanthropist, and an icon of American country music. She was the fourth-born of twelve children to a homemaker mother and subsistence farmer father, and she grew up in a one-room cabin in rural Sevier County, Tennessee. Despite her family's economic hardships, Dolly gained exposure to music at an early age. She drew inspiration and knowledge from her family members, especially her musical mother, who sang and played guitar. Dolly began performing in her local church at age six, and began writing songs and playing guitar not long after that. By ten years old, she was performing on local radio and television programs in East Tennessee, recording her first single, "Puppy Love," for the Louisiana-based Goldband Records label at thirteen. She moved to Nashville after completing high school in 1964 to pursue a career as a country singer. Many of her first songs were cowritten with her uncle Bill Owens and performed by other artists, including Hank Williams Jr., Bill Phillips, and Kitty Wells. Her songwriting style was heavily influenced by traditional Appalachian folk, country, gospel, and bluegrass music.

Her singing and performing career took off when she started appearing on the wildly popular *The Porter Wagoner Show*. With Porter's help, Dolly was signed by RCA Victor in 1967. After a shaky first few years, Dolly finally achieved solo success with hits like "Coat of Many Colors" and "Jolene," which showcased Dolly's inimitable storytelling abilities and impressive vocal range. In 1974, Dolly ended her professional partnership with Porter to wholeheartedly pursue her solo career (which inspired the song "I Will Always Love You"). She is one of the most frequently nominated female country performers of all time and has written over three thousand songs since her humble beginnings as a child. She has also built a legacy of philanthropy, supporting children's literacy, the LGBTQ community, animal rights, and many other causes through her own organizations and her support of others. Having described her personal style as a combination of Mother Goose, Cinderella, and "the town trollop," Dolly has become a fashion icon as much as a musical one. She is celebrated for her witty humor, humble perspective, and her constant drive to continue writing songs to this day.



Patti Smith

DECEMBER 30, 1946–

Patricia Lee “Patti” Smith is an American poet, singer-songwriter, and key figure of the punk rock movement in New York City. Born in Chicago, Illinois, Patti was the eldest of four children, the daughter of jazz-singer-turned-waitress Beverly and Honeywell machinist Grant Smith. She moved with her family from Chicago’s South Side to Philadelphia, and then to Woodbury, New Jersey. As a child, Patti dealt with frequent bouts of serious illnesses such as scarlet fever and pneumonia, gender confusion, and feelings of isolation. As she grew older, she found solace in literature, art, music, and performance. Some of her earliest musical and literary influences included John Coltrane, the Rolling Stones, the French Symbolist poet Arthur Rimbaud, and Little Richard.

In the summer of 1967, after Patti was laid off from her job at a local South Jersey textbook factory, she decided to move to New York City. Once there, she quickly acclimated to the art scene, writing poems, drawing, and attending many shows with her then-partner Robert Mapplethorpe. As she developed as a performer through underground theater and poetry readings, she met musician Lenny Kaye, who would go on to become a member of the Patti Smith Group. The two teamed up, and after gathering a few more performers, they recorded their first single, “Hey Joe / Piss Factory,” in 1974. After gaining traction from playing local shows at venues like CBGB, the Patti Smith Group was soon signed to Arista Records by

Clive Davis. Their first album, *Horses*, was produced by John Cale and released to wide critical acclaim, breaking through the American Top 50 at number forty-seven. The group was one of the first to seamlessly fuse punk rock and poetry in a time when punk was first developing as a major movement within American music. Patti’s vocal style was unapologetic in every way. Her singing performances involved shrieks, slurs, and howls.

In recent years, Patti has continued a legacy of innovative songwriting, iconic prose, and political activism, aligning closely with antiwar and environmental causes. She was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2007, and her memoir *Just Kids* won the National Book Award for nonfiction. Nicknamed the “punk poet laureate,” Smith has influenced a wide range of musicians, including Shirley Manson, Michael Stipe, Madonna, and Martha Wainwright.



JUNE MILLINGTON

APRIL 14, 1948–

June Millington is an award-winning Filipino-American guitarist, songwriter, producer, educator, and founding member and lead guitarist of the pioneering 1970s all-female rock band Fanny. Born in Manila, the Philippines, to a Filipina socialite mother and a U.S. Navy lieutenant commander father, June began playing the piano and the ukulele at age eight, often playing along by ear to songs she listened to on the radio. When she heard a guitar played for the first time at church, she was immediately smitten, and she received her first guitar as a birthday gift from her mother at age thirteen. Around that same time, June and her family moved to Sacramento, California. June began learning popular folk songs and picked up electric guitar in high school. Her sister Jean began playing bass at the same time.

In 1965, June and Jean formed the Svelts, their first all-female rock group, and gradually built a following through their shows at high school dances, air force bases, and frat parties. The two sisters moved to Los Angeles, where they rejoined members of the Svelts in the second iteration of their band, Wild Honey. Discouraged by a lack of professional success and recognition, June and her bandmates had planned to disband after one final performance at the Troubadour club in Los Angeles, when they were miraculously spotted by the secretary for Richard Perry, a well-established record producer. Wild Honey signed with Reprise Records, becoming the

first all-female rock group signed to a major label, and changed their name to Fanny. The band went on to release five albums, landing two top-forty singles on the U.S. Billboard charts, and touring internationally with bands like the Kinks, Humble Pie, and Jethro Tull. Despite the band's obvious talent and support from famous fans like David Bowie and Barbra Streisand, Fanny dealt with continual sexism from peers, engineers, label staff, and audiences alike. The pressure to prioritize image over substance, coupled with interpersonal band conflicts and a lack of large-scale commercial success, drove June away from the band in 1974. In 2018, she spoke to *Rolling Stone* about her experiences with sexism in the industry. "It wasn't just the pressure. . . . It was the psychic and emotional energy you had to expend to prove over and over that you could play as good as guys, or in a lot of cases, better."

After leaving Fanny, June began a solo career in music, immersing herself in the women's music movement and doing advocacy work on the behalf of the LGBTQ community. She founded the Institute for the Musical Arts with her longtime romantic partner Ann Hackler in Goshen, Massachusetts, where she lives today.



Bonnie Raitt

NOVEMBER 8, 1949–

Bonnie Raitt is an American blues singer-songwriter, legendary guitarist, Grammy-winning musician, and longtime activist. Born in Burbank, California, to Broadway musical star John Raitt and pianist Marjorie Haydock, Bonnie was raised in the Quaker tradition throughout her childhood. At eight, she received her first guitar for Christmas. Although as a child she preferred the piano, Bonnie would learn her way around the guitar from her lap-steel-guitar-playing grandfather and some counselors at a Quaker summer camp in the Adirondacks.

At seventeen, Bonnie enrolled in Radcliffe College, intending to major in social relations and African studies. This plan quickly changed upon meeting blues promoter Dick Waterman at one of her local performances near Boston. She decided to take a semester off during her second year of college and move to Philadelphia with Waterman. With his help, Bonnie was brought into a circle of major blues players, and she was praised by several music writers for her expert slide guitar playing.

After a fortuitous show at the Gaslight Cafe in New York City, she was offered a record deal with Warner Bros. Records. In the decade and a half following her first deal

with Warner Bros., Bonnie struggled with alcohol and drug abuse. Unable to make a mainstream commercial breakthrough with her music, she was dropped by Warner Bros. in 1983. In 1989, after several collaborations and benefit shows, Bonnie signed with Capitol Records and released what was now her tenth album, *Nick of Time*. The album finally brought Bonnie commercial success, sweeping the 1990 Grammy Awards in four categories.

Alongside her music career, Bonnie has worked as an activist and progressive advocate. She cofounded Musicians United for Safe Energy (MUSE) and partners with the Guacamole Fund to drive ticket sales that benefit nonprofit organizations working toward sustainable energy solutions and environmental protection. She was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2000, and continues to tour and perform to this day.



Kim Gordon

APRIL 28, 1953 –

Kim Althea Gordon is an American musician and songwriter best known as the bassist and vocalist in the seminal noise rock band Sonic Youth. Born in Rochester, New York, Kim moved to Los Angeles with her family at the age of five. Her father was a sociology professor at UCLA and her mother was a homemaker and seamstress. Kim was inspired by a variety of artistic and musical influences from an early age. She drew from her father's taste for jazz and avant-garde music and idolized musicians like Joni Mitchell, Marianne Faithfull, and Françoise Hardy. As a teenager, Kim experienced feelings of isolation, and struggled to navigate a volatile relationship with her schizophrenic brother. As a result, she was often perceived as shy and aloof. In her memoir, *Girl in a Band*, which reflects on her personal life and experiences in the music industry, Kim writes:

The biggest challenge as I saw it was to pretend I had some superhuman ability to withstand pain. Add that to the pressure girls feel anyway to please other people, to be good, and well mannered, and orderly—and I backslid even more into a world where nothing could upset or hurt me.

After high school, she worked briefly as an assistant for the art dealer Larry Gagosian. She attended Santa Monica College for two years before transferring to York University in Toronto, Canada, with the intention of

studying visual art and dance. There, she and a group of friends started a band called Below the Belt for a class project. While the band itself was short-lived, it helped Kim discover her penchant for performance. In 1980, she moved to New York City, where she crashed with friends (including artists Jenny Holzer and Cindy Sherman) while acclimating to her surroundings. She started going downtown to watch No Wave bands perform. The genre's blend of 1970s punk rock and 1960s jazz exuded expression and freedom, and for Kim, it was a catalyst for her own musical aspirations.

In 1980, Kim met Thurston Moore through a friend, and the two started dating and playing music together. Kim played bass and Thurston was on guitar; they brought in second guitarist Lee Ranaldo, as well as a rotating series of drummers, to form Male Bonding, which was later renamed Sonic Youth. The band gained ground after recording four independent albums. In 1988, they signed with Enigma Records and released their breakthrough double LP, *Daydream Nation*. Sonic Youth's next album, *Goo*, released in 1990, was the band's first commercial hit, boasting the single "Kool Thing." Their newfound success led to extensive touring with bands like Nirvana, Babes in Toyland, Dinosaur Jr., and Mudhoney.

Kim's lyrics, which explored themes like feminism, body image, sexism, and the vagaries of pop culture, were complemented by her raspy vocal delivery and the band's



dissonant instrumentation. Sonic Youth continued to write music, record, and tour until 2011, when the band went on an indefinite hiatus after Thurston had an affair that ended his relationship with Kim. Following the dissolution of Sonic Youth (and her marriage to Thurston), Kim wrote *Girl in a Band*.

Soon afterward, Kim started up a new experimental band called Body/Head with her longtime friend Bill Nace.

Over the last few decades, Kim has also established herself as a visual artist, curator, writer, and fashion designer, exhibiting internationally and collaborating with stylist Daisy von Furth to create the skater brand X-Girl. As a trailblazer in the noise rock and riot grrrl scenes, Kim has influenced countless visual artists and musicians, including Sofia Coppola, Kathleen Hanna, and Carrie Brownstein.

“Gender becomes totally non-existent when playing music, especially jazz. It’s like being within a flock of birds and that telepathic thing . . . you turn one way and everybody turns. If you’re thinking about anything else, that kind of thing can’t happen. I often play with my eyes closed. It’s either good or bad. There’s no gender, there’s just music.”

—JENNIFER LEITHAM

JENNIFER LEITHAM

AUGUST 10, 1953–

Jennifer Jane Leitham is an American left-handed double bassist, a singer, jazz virtuoso, transgender advocate, and educator. Born John Leitham in Reading, Pennsylvania, she moved to Los Angeles in 1983 to start her extremely prolific career as a studio musician and bandleader. After performing for decades with the likes of Peggy Lee, George Shearing, Mel Tormé, Woody Herman, and countless others, Jennifer came out as transgender in 2001 while touring with Doc Severinsen. She nearly lost her life to surgical complications the following year, and stated in interviews that she dealt with many instances of prejudice, sexism, and discrimination within certain circles of the notoriously chauvinistic jazz world once she returned to her profession.

Despite this initial bumpy return to the industry, Jennifer found herself with a wider and more inclusive audience as a result of her coming out. Her playing style also transformed posttransition; instead of sitting still with the bass, she stands to play the instrument and dances along with her own tunes. With a versatile and highly percussive technique, she is an expert improviser and passionate performer. She has frequented some of the

top jazz venues and festivals across the globe, including the Blue Note in New York, the Louis Armstrong Jazz Festival in Békéscsaba, Hungary, and the Yamaha Jazz Festival in Hamamatsu, Japan, among many others. Jennifer is the subject of *I Stand Corrected*, an award-winning documentary based on her life, career, and transition, and she is a fierce advocate within the LGBTQ community. She routinely performs and tours as part of her own trio around the country, and has more than one hundred recordings to her name.



SHEILA E.

DECEMBER 12, 1957–

Sheila Escovedo, known by her performing name, Sheila E., is an American multi-instrumentalist, singer-songwriter, and producer who is nicknamed the “Queen of Percussion.” She’s often described as one of Prince’s protégées, but in fact, it took Prince years to persuade her to join his band. Raised in Oakland in the 1960s and 1970s at the height of the Black Panther movement, Sheila had to grow up fast; she dealt with racism, violence, and musical prejudice from an early age. Despite these hardships, music proved to be a constant source of solace and healing for Sheila.

The accomplished multi-instrumentalist got her start performing Latin jazz music as a five-year-old child prodigy with her famed percussionist father, Pete Escovedo. As a teenager, she filled in for the conga player at a gig with her father’s band, and ended up taking over as the new player permanently. By her early twenties, Sheila had performed with the likes of Herbie Hancock, Carlos Santana, Diana Ross, and Marvin Gaye. She first met Prince in 1978 after his San Francisco concert. He flirted with her and admitted that he had been following her career, hoping she would be interested in joining his band. While Prince couldn’t yet afford to bring Sheila on as a full-time instrumentalist, the two exchanged numbers and began a close friendship. Prince eventually signed her to his Paisley Park Records label, and she made her first foray into pop music singing guest vocals on his single “Erotic City.” In 1984, she released her debut album, *The*

Glamorous Life, coproduced by Prince, which resulted in two Billboard singles (“The Glamorous Life” and “The Belle of St. Mark”) and several MTV and Grammy Award nominations. That same year, she joined Prince as the opener on his Purple Rain Tour, and the two began a brief romantic relationship in addition to their ongoing creative partnership.

In 1985, Sheila released her sophomore album, *Romance 1600*, and appeared in multiple films. She worked as Prince’s drummer and musical director on the Sign o’ the Times Tour, *The Black Album*, and *Lovesexy*, until she left the group in 1989. Sheila has since gone on to perform with artists like Beyoncé, Ringo Starr, Cyndi Lauper, and Gloria Estefan, and performed with Prince as a guest artist several times before his death in 2016. Sheila’s work throughout her five-decade-long career spans several genres, and she is widely regarded as one of the most innovative drummers of all time. Her autobiography, *The Beat of my Own Drum*, was released in 2014.



Wu Man

JANUARY 2, 1963–

Wu Man is an internationally renowned Chinese composer, virtuoso, and educator. She is the leading international ambassador of the pipa, a Chinese lute-like instrument with a two-thousand-year legacy, sharing its sound with listeners and musical circles around the world. Wu began pipa lessons at the age of nine, going on to study at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing at age thirteen—making her the youngest student in the school's history. She received her master's degree in pipa performance (the first degree of its kind) from the conservatory in 1987. Wu trained in the Pudong style of pipa playing, which is characterized by using rapid strumming, percussive techniques, and vibrato accents to create dynamic, emotional tension in compositions. It is one of the most distinctive and difficult styles to play, and allows players to explore a great variety of sounds.

In 1990, Wu ventured west to the United States. There, she collaborated with the Kronos Quartet, Philip Glass, Ravi Shankar, Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Project, and countless other musicians. Her career as a soloist has taken her all over the world, and she has performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the German Radio Symphony

Orchestra, and the Moscow Soloists, in addition to many other orchestras. Wu has worked tirelessly to introduce the pipa and its rich cultural legacy to Western audiences, evolving the role of the pipa far beyond its initial sphere. She has been the recipient of several prestigious awards and achievements, including *Musical America's* 2013 Instrumentalist of the Year award, and has received several Grammy nominations. She was also the first Chinese artist to perform at the White House.

In 2015, Wu was appointed as a visiting professor to three major Chinese conservatories in Beijing, Shanghai, and her hometown of Zhejiang. Through Wu's inventive compositions and partnerships, she has created new opportunities for the pipa in all types of musical and artistic settings. She currently lives in Southern California with her husband and son, and continues to teach and perform internationally as a solo artist and as part of various ensembles.



BRENDA FASSIE

NOVEMBER 3, 1964–MAY 9, 2004

Brenda Nokuzola Fassie, known to many of her fans as MaBrrr, was a South African singer and anti-apartheid activist who is considered to be one of the first internationally prominent South African pop stars in history. Brenda, named after the American country singer Brenda Lee, was born in the Langa township of Cape Town, the youngest of nine children. She began singing as a child, often accompanied by her mother on the piano, and performed for churches, hospitals, and paying tourists. When Brenda was sixteen, the producer Kolozi Lebona traveled to Langa to meet her, having heard her name mentioned by many fellow Cape Town musicians. Kolozi took Brenda under his wing, inviting her to live with his family in Soweto, Johannesburg, to pursue music more seriously. Her formal education ended when she stepped in as part of the vocal trio Joy to replace a band member on maternity leave.

After gaining popularity with Joy, she formed an Afropop group called Brenda and the Big Dudes in 1983, which achieved international fame with their first single, “Weekend Special.” The hit took Brenda and the Big Dudes abroad to the United States, Europe, South America, and Australia. Brenda soon began working with Sello “Chicco” Twala, a musician and producer, and their partnership went on to be one of the most commercially successful in South African music history. *Too Late for Mama*, the album they released in 1989, was a multiplatinum success. One of the album’s singles, “Black President,” was a tribute to Nelson

Mandela and his release from prison; it was rapidly banned by the conservative government at the time.

After building a mainstream following, Brenda shifted from singing mainly in English to singing in Zulu, Xhosa, and Sotho, the indigenous languages of South Africa. In 1989, she married Nhlanhla Mbambo, a Durban socialite, but their troubled marriage was marked by domestic violence, and they divorced two years later. Soon, the pressures of fame and touring began to take a toll on Brenda. She slipped into drug addiction, started canceling her performances, and suffered financial difficulties. In 1995, she checked into a rehabilitation program after her girlfriend Poppie Sihlahla died of a drug overdose. Brenda managed to revive her career, but struggled with drug addiction for the rest of her life.

In 1997, she partnered with Chicco again to release *Memeza*, the bestselling album in South Africa that year. Her following album *Nomakanjani* reached triple platinum status within months of its release date. In her later years, she became increasingly open about her sexuality, discussing her past relationships with women in interviews.

At only thirty-nine years old, Brenda passed away from complications due to past drug use and asthma. Throughout her career, Brenda was adored for her bold performances, musical talent, and her advocacy for local South African communities and victims of the apartheid regime, as well as her courage to live openly as a queer musician.



TERRI LYNE CARRINGTON

AUGUST 4, 1965–

Terri Lyne Carrington is an American Grammy Award-winning jazz drummer, composer, singer, producer, bandleader, and educator who was one of the first musicians of her time to break down the gender barriers in the jazz world. Terri was born into a musical family in Medford, Massachusetts. Her father, Sonny Carrington, was a saxophone player and president of the Boston Jazz Society; her mother was a piano player; and her grandfather had played the drums in his heyday with musicians like Fats Waller and Chuck Berry. Terri enjoyed early exposure to the jazz community as a child, and was gifted her grandfather's drum set when she was seven. At age ten, she became the youngest Boston musician to receive a union card, and she performed her first gig with the notable trumpeter Clark Terry, one of her many mentors. When she was eleven, she received a full scholarship to the Berklee College of Music.

Over several years, Terri studied, performed, and traveled around the United States, conducting drum clinics at schools and colleges. In 1983, she moved to New York, where she was an in-demand musician, performing with jazz legends like Stan Getz, Pharoah Sanders, and Cassandra Wilson, before relocating to Los Angeles to become the house drummer for *The Arsenio Hall Show*. Terri was one of the first female drummers in the jazz genre to achieve this level of success.

In 1989, Terri released her debut album *Real Life Story*, featuring Carlos Santana, Patrice Rushen, and Gerald Albright, among others, for which she received a Grammy nomination. She was awarded an honorary doctorate from Berklee in 2003, returning to Boston two years later to take a professorship at her alma mater.

Since then, Terri has gone on to record, produce, arrange, and release several studio albums, including the Grammy Award-winning *The Mosaic Project*, which celebrates many talented contemporary female jazz artists, including Esperanza Spalding, Cassandra Wilson, Shea Rose, and Dee Dee Bridgewater. Terri's release *Money Jungle: Provocative in Blue* features covers from the original 1962 album *Money Jungle* by Duke Ellington, and won the Grammy for Best Jazz Instrumental Album, making her the first woman in history to win the award. She is the Zildjian Chair in Performance at Berklee's Global Jazz Institute and the artistic director of the Berklee Beantown Jazz Festival.



ANDREA ECHEVERRI

SEPTEMBER 13, 1965–

Andrea Echeverri is a Colombian singer-songwriter, guitarist, and visual artist best known as a member of the groundbreaking rock band Aterciopelados. She is one of the most visible and outspoken women musicians in South America, constantly using her platform to call attention to feminist and environmental causes. In Bogotá, Andrea's mother taught her to sing and play the guitar as a child, often using boleros and rancheras as learning material. As an adult, Andrea met Héctor Buitrago, member of the local hardcore punk band La Pestilencia. Andrea combined her folkloric musical sensibilities with Héctor's experience and love of hard rock in their first collaboration—a band called Delia and the Amino Acids. This eventually became their longtime band, Aterciopelados, which means “the velvety ones” in Spanish.

Héctor and Andrea started the Aterciopelados group in 1992, releasing their first album in 1993. The band grew in popularity for their combination of diverse musical stylings and political lyrics, as well as Andrea's sultry vocals, powerful lyrics, and commanding stage presence. Their second album, *El Dorado*, combined their rock and bolero-infused sounds with the traditional rhythms and sounds of

indigenous Colombian music, bringing the band widespread acclaim across Latin America. Aterciopelados was one of the first Colombian bands to gain international fame. They are widely regarded as the country's most notable rock group.

In addition to her work with Aterciopelados, Andrea has released several solo albums, exploring issues of feminism, motherhood, nature, and antiwar themes in her lyrics. She and Aterciopelados have been consistently outspoken on issues of political injustice, women's rights, and the environment, especially as those affect their native Colombia. In 2007, the band won the Latin Grammy Award for Best Alternative Album, and Andrea and her bandmates continue to write and perform to this day.



JANET WEISS

SEPTEMBER 24, 1965–

Janet Lee Weiss is best known as the drummer for Portland-based band Sleater-Kinney, a seminal part of the American indie rock scene in the late 1990s and early 2000s. She is regarded as one of the best drummers of all time by publications like *Rolling Stone* and *NME*, possessing a unique physicality and force that acts as the foundation for her band's aggressive sound. Originally from Hollywood, California, Janet learned to play guitar before she ever touched a drum set. She moved north to attend San Francisco State University, graduating with a degree in photography. In San Francisco, she immersed herself in the local club scene, adopting the burgeoning punk and DIY attitude of local bands like Camper Van Beethoven and the Donner Party.

At twenty-two, equipped with a single drum lesson and two weeks of practice, she joined the all-girl trio the Furies and went on tour. She moved to Portland, Oregon, in 1989, and continued developing her drumming style by observing countless live performances and studying the beats of legendary drummers like John Bonham of Led Zeppelin and Topper Headon of the Clash.

In 1995, Janet and her band Junior High opened for Sleater-Kinney at La Luna club in Portland, Oregon. Sleater-Kinney members Carrie Brownstein and Corin Tucker had connected in the flourishing riot grrrl scene in Olympia, Washington. Riot grrrl combined feminist consciousness with punk music, addressing issues of patriarchy, domestic

abuse, sexuality, and female empowerment through performances, zines, and countless organizational efforts.

After the show in Portland, a mutual friend informed Janet that Sleater-Kinney was searching for a drummer. Shortly thereafter, Janet successfully auditioned at Corin's house in 1996, blowing her new bandmates away with her powerful, improvised beats on the song "Dig Me Out." The next year, the band released their third album, *Dig Me Out*, on the Kill Rock Stars label, full of songs about romance, sorrow, feminism, and survival. Sleater-Kinney gained traction over the next several years, labeled "America's best rock band" by Greil Marcus in a 2001 issue of *Time* Magazine. Their 2002 release *One Beat* propelled them skyward; the chemistry between Carrie and Corin's dueling, aggressive guitars, their piercing call-and-response vocals, and Janet's thrashing rock 'n' roll beats brought the band critical acclaim. Their politically conscious lyrical themes and instrumental experimentation took them beyond their riot grrrl roots and allowed the band to broadcast their values to a broader audience. The band went on a hiatus of several years following their 2005 release *The Woods* but reunited in 2012 and released *No Cities to Love* in early 2015.

During her breaks from Sleater-Kinney, Janet has also played drums for other indie rock bands, including Stephen Malkmus and the Jicks, Bright Eyes, Wild Flag, and the Shins.



BJÖRK

NOVEMBER 21, 1965–

Björk Guðmundsdóttir is an Icelandic singer-songwriter, producer, actress, style icon, and DJ known worldwide for her singular voice and eclectic and wide-ranging musical explorations. Born in Reykjavik to progressive parents (her mother was an activist and her father a union electrician), Björk's musicality was encouraged from a young age. At five, she began attending a children's music school in Reykjavik, where she learned to sing, play multiple instruments, and develop her knowledge of theory and music history. She went on to record a self-titled debut album at the age of eleven, a collection of Icelandic folk songs.

During her adolescence, Björk cofounded several punk bands, hopping between the roles of drummer, keyboardist, and vocalist. In 1984, she and three fellow Icelandic musicians formed Kukl, a gothic rock band that showcased some of her singular vocal cues: howls and shrieks. The members of Kukl went on to become the Sugarcubes, one of Iceland's biggest rock bands. Their debut album, *Life's Too Good*, brought them widespread acclaim, and the band signed to One Little Indian Records in the UK and to Elektra Records in the United States. In 1992, the Sugarcubes disbanded and Björk moved to London to pursue an independent musical career. Her first adult solo album in 1993, *Debut*, was deeply inspired by the local club culture and pulsing beats; it marked her shift toward electronic pop, house music, and trip-hop.

Björk has always set trends and broken rules in her albums, living on the threshold of technology, pushing past typical songwriting conventions, and fusing visual art with her musical compositions. Among her biggest influences are Brian Eno, Kraftwerk, Joni Mitchell, and Kate Bush. She is a fierce collaborator, having worked with countless producers, fashion designers, video directors, and avant-garde instrumentalists. A retrospective exhibition of Björk's visual and musical work was held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in spring 2015; and a traveling virtual reality exhibit by the singer debuted in Sydney, Australia, in 2016.

Björk has also been an integral part of efforts to raise awareness of environmental issues; she founded the Náttúra Campaign to combat the development of aluminum factories in Iceland and organized the *Stopp—Let's Protect the Park* nature protection benefit concert in 2014. In 2011, she partnered with the city of Reykjavik and the University of Iceland to create the Biophilia Educational Project, an organization dedicated to children's exploration of creativity through science and music.



MESHELL NDEGEOCELLO

AUGUST 29, 1968–

Meshell Ndegeocello is an American musical polymath—rapper, singer-songwriter, bassist, composer—and one of the earliest trailblazers of the neo-soul genre, an extension of contemporary R&B. She was born Michelle Lynn Johnson in Berlin, Germany, to a military sergeant and jazz saxophonist father and healthcare-worker mother. Her family moved to Washington, D.C., where she attended the Duke Ellington School of the Arts and honed her musical chops performing in D.C. clubs as a teenager. She adopted her current stage name at seventeen; the Swahili “Ndegeocello” translates to “free like a bird” in English. After a brief stint studying music at Howard University, Meshell moved to New York City and began performing solo after several unsuccessful auditions for local bands. She signed with Madonna’s Maverick label in the early 1990s, and her debut album *Plantation Lullabies* was released in 1993. It received three Grammy nominations and was described by Renee Graham of the *Boston Globe* as “the beginning of the neo-soul genre.” This masterful debut effort showcased Meshell’s baritone vocals, adept bass precision, and socially conscious lyrics that celebrated black culture and criticized racial injustice.

Her 1996 follow-up album, *Peace Beyond Passion*, was her largest commercial success, critically exploring sexual fluidity and the way religious texts oppress marginalized communities.

Meshell continues to be an in-demand studio player, having recorded with Madonna, Alanis Morissette, John Mellencamp, and many others. Meshell’s songwriting blurs the lines of gender and sexuality as well as genre. Her work is greatly influenced by a diverse collection of musical icons like Prince, Stevie Wonder, Nina Simone, Brian Eno, and more. She has contributed songs to compilations benefiting AIDS charities and women’s empowerment efforts in the Congo. In 2016, Meshell composed the theme song for Ava Duvernay’s *Queen Sugar* series on the Oprah Winfrey Network, and her latest album of 1980s and 1990s cover songs, *Ventriloquism*, came out in early 2018 to great critical acclaim. She currently lives in upstate New York with her partner and their two children.



KATHLEEN HANNA

NOVEMBER 12, 1968–

Kathleen Hanna is an American singer, musician, writer, and feminist activist known as a key pioneer of riot grrrl, an underground feminist punk movement that originated in the early 1990s in the Pacific Northwest. Born in Portland, Oregon, Kathleen moved frequently as a child due to her father's changes in employment. Coping with this instability on the home front, Kathleen found solace in music from an early age; and she demonstrated a great aptitude for it, memorizing the entirety of Carole King's *Tapestry* by the age of six.

During a brief stint when her family lived in Washington, D.C., Kathleen's mother took her nine-year-old daughter to the Solidarity Day rally to hear Gloria Steinem speak. The rally was one of Kathleen's earliest encounters with the feminist movement, and the event became a catalyst for her developing identity.

When the family finally returned to Portland, Kathleen entered high school and her parents split up. In high school, she discovered punk and reggae music, experimented with drugs, and was often suspended from class. She was narrowly accepted to Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, where she studied photography. During her time at Evergreen, Kathleen was frustrated by the lack of women's studies courses, the abundance of sexist professors, and the censorship of her own visual work. She and a group of fellow students opened their own gallery space to show work that was politically driven

and socially relevant, and they invited local bands like the Go Team and Nirvana to perform in between exhibitions.

Kathleen eventually fell in with Kathi Wilcox and Tobi Vail, who, along with Billy Karren, would become her bandmates in the group Bikini Kill. The group quickly gained an audience in the Olympia punk music scene, despite most of the members' newness to their instruments and to songwriting in general. They used their shows as forums to educate their audience on feminist issues, calling for women to move to the front while men stayed toward the back of venues, and handing out fanzines that focused on themes of female empowerment and social justice. Together with the group Bratmobile, the band is credited with the start of the riot grrrl movement, which combined punk, radical third-wave feminism, and political action. The ethos of riot grrrl echoed similar sentiments from groundbreaking musicians in the 1970s and 1980s, such as Patti Smith, Siouxsie Sioux, Kim Gordon, and Poly Styrene, who often wrote lyrics focused on sociopolitical issues.

Bikini Kill disbanded in 1997, and Kathleen went on to create the lo-fi project the Julie Ruin and electro-pop band Le Tigre. She went on a hiatus in the mid-2000s when her health began suffering, and in 2010 she was diagnosed with late-stage Lyme disease. Nowadays, Kathleen is healthy and back in action, performing internationally with a new iteration of the Julie Ruin.



neko case

SEPTEMBER 8, 1970–

Neko Richelle Case is a force of nature—an American singer-songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, and inimitable vocalist who invented the country-noir genre. Born on a military base in Alexandria, Virginia, Neko moved around during most of her childhood, making stops in Western Massachusetts, Vermont, Washington State, and Oregon. At fifteen, she left home and began drumming for a few different punk bands in Tacoma, gaining exposure to the emerging grunge scene there. She moved to Vancouver, Canada, in 1993 to attend the Emily Carr University of Art + Design and immerse herself in the local music scene. There, Neko continued to play in a variety of bands, including Maow, who signed with Mint Records in 1996.

Maow's sole release with the label included the first public recordings of Neko's singing voice, which immediately captivated Bill Baker, the cofounder of Mint. With the label's support, Neko released *The Virginian* in 1997. Her solo recording debut featured a combination of cover songs and her own compositions, cowritten with several collaborators, including her friend and eventual bandmate Carl Newman of the New Pornographers. Neko also recorded vocals for a few songs on the New Pornographers' 2000 debut release, *Mass Romantic*, which became an enormous indie success. These two records marked the beginning of Neko's myriad collaborations with notable Canadian musicians, as well as her journey toward success as an independent singer-songwriter.

An expert lyricist and storyteller, Neko weaves haunting imagery, autobiographical details, and traditional folk narratives together to create songs rooted in folk and Americana while expanding toward a darker, more alternative genre of her very own. Recognizing her own unique take on country music, Neko coined the term "country-noir" to describe the sound of her next two albums, *Furnace Room Lullaby* and *Blacklisted*. Both albums included fewer cover songs and more original compositions, as Neko strengthened her songwriting chops and expanded her instrumentation to include tenor guitar, saw, lap steel guitar, and piano. In 2004, Neko signed with Anti Records, which has released all of her subsequent albums to date, including *Fox Confessor Brings the Flood*, which peaked at number fifty-four on the U.S. Billboard charts and rocketed her to new levels of success. Her songwriting style is marked by captivating, occasionally sardonic narratives, clarion melodies, and inventive production choices.

Outside of performing and songwriting, Neko is a fierce advocate for feminism, social justice, animal rights, and environmental causes alike. She uses her performances as well as social media to hold everyone from archaic media outlets to industry patriarchs accountable, famously tweeting "IM NOT A FUCKING 'WOMAN IN MUSIC,' IM A FUCKING MUSICIAN IN MUSIC!" in response to a sexist *Playboy* headline. In the summer of 2018, she released her seventh solo album, *Hell-On*.



Selena

APRIL 16, 1971–MARCH 31, 1995

Selena Quintanilla-Pérez, the “queen of Tejano music,” was a Mexican-American singer, songwriter, actress, and fashion designer who is remembered as one of the most celebrated and influential Latin artists of all time. Born in Lake Jackson, Texas, Selena first started singing around the age of six. Her father, Abraham Quintanilla Jr., a former musician, noted Selena’s natural talent, and formed Selena y los Dinos, a family band that featured her brother Abraham Quintanilla III on bass guitar and sister Suzette Quintanilla on drums.

The group started out performing in the family’s Tex-Mex restaurant, and then landed gigs at weddings, quinceañeras, fairs, and clubs. The family was often strapped for cash during Selena’s childhood, and when the restaurant shuttered during the recession in the 1980s, Selena y los Dinos became the Quintanillas’ main source of income. Abraham Jr. wrote original Tejano-style songs for the band with Spanish lyrics, and the English-speaking Selena initially had to learn the words phonetically before she eventually became fluent in Spanish. Tejano, a Mexican-Texan blend of ranchera, polka, and rock, was still a male-dominated genre at the time. Because they were fronted by a female singer, the band sometimes had difficulty booking shows. But, in 1982, Selena y los Dinos signed to the Corpus Christi-based label Freddie Records, which gave them more

negotiating power and helped them grow increasingly popular at local clubs and fairs.

With the band’s growing success and performance demands, Selena dropped out of school in the eighth grade in order to concentrate on touring the country with her family. (She did eventually earn her GED through the American School of Correspondence in Lansing, Illinois.) Selena and the band finally got their big break when she won Best Female Vocalist of the Year at the 1986 Tejano Music Awards. In 1989, the band signed with a bigger label, EMI Latin Records. Their debut release of the self-titled *Selena* landed at number seven on the Billboard Regional Mexican albums chart, and EMI helped set up a partnership between Selena and Coca-Cola.

In 1992, Selena married her guitarist, Chris Pérez, and the band’s release *Entre a Mi Mundo* achieved breakthrough status that same year with singles like “Como la Flor,” widely considered to be Selena’s signature song. In the final three years of her life, Selena became actively involved with several charities; started a fashion venture; released her fourth studio album, *Amor Prohibido*; and won a Grammy award for Best Mexican/American album in 1994.

In 1995, Selena performed a sold-out concert for over sixty thousand people at the Houston Astrodome. She was already at work on her first English-language



crossover album, *Dreaming of You*. Tragically, her life was cut short by her fan club and fashion boutique manager Yolanda Saldivar, who fatally shot Selena in the back following a dispute over Yolanda's embezzlement of funds. The shock of Selena's death rocked North America. The Quintanilla family received condolences from the likes of Julio Iglesias, Madonna, Gloria Estefan, and the Clintons. *Dreaming of You*, released only a few months later, went on to debut at number one on the U.S. Billboard 200, making Selena the first Latin artist to ever achieve that feat.

Selena is remembered as a passionate, humble, and deeply talented musician who introduced Tejano music to a worldwide audience, promoted positive body image, and broke musical barriers for future Latinx musicians. Beyoncé, Solange, Lady Gaga, Demi Lovato, and many other prominent musicians have all cited Selena as an inspiration and major influence.

“Music is a fellowship. If you want to count me out because I refuse to conform to ideas of gender or of genre, you’re only making a fool of yourself. Time will tell.”

—MESHELL NDEGEOCELLO

Gabriela Quintero

JUNE 6, 1973–

Gabriela Quintero is a Mexican guitarist and songwriter, best known as the rhythmic, percussive half of the internationally acclaimed guitar duo Rodrigo y Gabriela. She grew up in a middle-class home in Mexico City, and drew inspiration as a child from her parents' love of flamenco, jazz, and rock. Her aunt exposed her to the work of bands like Metallica, Jimi Hendrix, and Black Sabbath, and it was heavy metal—love at first listen. In a twist of fate, Gabriela met fellow metalhead Rodrigo Sanchez while taking drama classes at La Casa de la Cultura (House of Culture), a local arts center. Gabriela and Rodrigo immediately bonded over their similar taste in music, and soon began dating. In the 1990s, the two played together in the heavy metal band Tierra Ácida, playing in some of the city's roughest clubs and bars. After a potential record deal fell through, the two decided to move to the resort town of Ixtapa, performing in beachside bars and hotels before eventually relocating to Europe.

They settled in Dublin, Ireland, in 1999 with only a thousand dollars between them and little knowledge of English. In order to support themselves, Rodrigo and Gabriela began gigging and busking in Copenhagen, Barcelona, and Dublin, where they met Damien Rice. Damien invited them to open for one of his shows and introduced them to Niall Muckian, band manager and owner of Rubyworks Records. Niall helped Rodrigo y Gabriela establish their act by landing the band their

first record deal on his label. Gradually, the band gained momentum, and their second studio album, *Rodrigo y Gabriela*, debuted at number one on the Irish album charts. Since these early days, Rodrigo y Gabriela have toured extensively around the world and released several more albums, experimenting with instrumentation and arrangements. In 2010, they performed at the White House state dinner for the Obamas and President Felipe Calderón of Mexico.

Rodrigo y Gabriela's musical style is influenced by a vast array of genres, including flamenco, heavy metal, salsa, and classic rock. Gabriela often provides the percussive "beats" to Rodrigo's lead guitar parts, incorporating flamenco-inspired hand tapping and inventive strumming techniques to set the consistent tempos of each song. Blending flamenco, metal, and rock methods, Gabriela has pioneered an entirely new style of guitar playing that defies categorization. She has also been an advocate for veganism, animal welfare, and environmental causes, and currently lives in Mexico. While she and Rodrigo ended their romantic relationship in 2012, they continue to tour and perform together.



Wata

NOVEMBER 27, YEAR UNKNOWN-

Yoko Mizuno, known by her stage name Wata, is a Japanese guitarist in Boris, an experimental rock band. As a child, Wata grew up playing the piano, but she craved the communal feeling of being in a band. Influenced by her brother, a Beatles-loving drummer, she picked up her first guitar at the age of sixteen. She drew early inspiration from guitarists like David Gilmour from Pink Floyd, who experimented with echo effects.

In 1992, she met Nagata, Takeshi, and Atsuo while attending Tokyo University. Despite the fact that they all played in different bands at the time, they formed a four-piece group in 1994. They named their new group Boris as a tribute to the Melvins' 1991 album *Bullhead*. Boris started out with a focus on sludge metal and hardcore punk, heavily influenced by the grunge explosion in the early 1990s. Their first release, a split album* with fellow Japanese punk band Barebones, was a single, hour-long song called *Absolutego*. In 1998, Boris signed with the Mangrove label and released their second album, *Amplifier Worship*, which explored additional electronic genres and widened their fan base. In a testament to their growing success, the band shared the stage with their original idols, the Melvins, for two nights in Tokyo the following year.

In 2001, Boris signed with Southern Lord Records, gaining distribution in the United States and exposure to a much wider audience. Their subsequent releases

began to showcase a sound described as fuzz rock, a blend between heavy metal and psychedelic rock. Their new sound proved to be more accessible, and their 2005 release *Pink* garnered praise and critical acclaim in Europe and the United States, topping many best album lists in publications like *Spin*, *Pitchfork*, and *Exclaim!* Boris has continued to tour extensively and release albums. *Dear*, released in 2017, is their twenty-seventh studio album.

Over the years, Wata has developed a unique approach to instrumentation, often using an e-bow to magnetically vibrate her guitar strings, achieving violin-like sounds, different types of sustain expressions, and manipulations of sonic feedback. Her range and versatility as a metal guitarist has earned her critical praise in a genre historically known as an all-boys club, and her visibility in the 1990s paved the way for future women guitarists in Japan and abroad. She consistently employs echo and fuzz effects in her guitar work, relying on the Roland Space Echo and Elk Big Muff pedals, along with her namesake WataFuzz pedal by MASF. She favors custom Gibson Les Paul guitars along with Matamp and Orange amplifiers.

* A split album contains tracks by two or more artists.



Lauryn Hill

MAY 26, 1975 -

Lauryn Noelle Hill is an American singer, songwriter, rapper, record producer, and actress known best for her work with the Fugees and for her groundbreaking 1998 solo album, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*. Born in East Orange, New Jersey, Lauryn grew up in a middle-class, musically inspired family. She grew up listening to artists like Aretha Franklin, Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, Nina Simone, and Gladys Knight. By thirteen, Lauryn had begun to sing and perform at school, participating in *Showtime at the Apollo's* Amateur Night and auditioning for roles in television and film in New York City. Lauryn met Prakazrel “Pras” Michel and Wyclef Jean, two Haitian immigrants, through mutual friends during her freshman year at Columbia High School in Maplewood, New Jersey. Pras invited her to join their hip-hop group, which eventually became known as the Fugees (short for refugees). As the Fugees started performing locally, Lauryn also added rapping to her singing and songwriting duties.

A high academic achiever, Lauryn was admitted to Columbia University when she graduated from high school. She left in her freshman year when the Fugees shook hands with Columbia/Ruffhouse Records on a deal in 1993. The group released their debut album *Blunted on Reality* in 1994, which blended the reggae, rock, and soul genres. While the Fugees didn't gain immediate success, Lauryn's artistry, style, and rich alto timbre helped the group stand out among their peers. They broke through

to the mainstream with their 1996 album *The Score*, which peaked at number one on the U.S. Billboard 200 and sold seventeen million copies worldwide.

Despite the Fugees' meteoric success, the group split up the following year as Lauryn and Wyclef ended what had been a turbulent romantic relationship. She soon met and fell in love with Rohan Marley, and began writing songs for *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* while pregnant with their first child. Recorded in Jamaica, New York City, and New Jersey, the album featured fellow musicians D'Angelo, Carlos Santana, Mary J. Blige, and John Legend. It broke with conventional hip-hop instrumentation to feature classical instruments such as timpani drums and clarinets. *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* was a groundbreaking accomplishment for Lauryn, eclipsing first-week sales records, and bringing hip-hop and neo-soul fully into the mainstream. The album won five Grammys, and garnered praise among countless critics as one of the greatest and most culturally significant albums of all time. It was selected for inclusion in the National Recording Registry by the Library of Congress.

Lauryn has continued to perform and tour sporadically since then, retreating from the spotlight in the early 2000s to focus on family life. In 2018, she announced a new North American tour to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*.





JULY 18, 1975–

Mathangi “Maya” Arulpragasam, better known as M.I.A., is a British–Sri Lankan rapper, singer-songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, record producer, and activist. As a baby, M.I.A. was brought from London to Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka. Her engineer and activist father was involved in the separatist politics of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, a group that pushed to create an independent state within the country. As Sri Lanka went into a full-blown civil war in the 1980s, M.I.A. relocated with her mother and her siblings to India, back to Sri Lanka temporarily, and eventually back to London, where they settled in the Mitcham district as refugees.

Despite a childhood marked by intense displacement, M.I.A. dove into creative hobbies like drawing and dancing. She discovered musicians like Whitney Houston, Paula Abdul, and Public Enemy through her burgeoning love of hip-hop. She was eventually admitted to London’s Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design. Although dissatisfied with her educational experience there, she managed to befriend students in fashion, advertising, and design, and graduated with a degree in film. At her first show of visual work, M.I.A. met Justine Frischmann of the band Elastica. She was commissioned by Justine to design the cover for Elastica’s single “The Bitch Don’t Work,” and wound up touring with the band to film a documentary about them. During that time, M.I.A. met the artist Peaches, an electronic musician

and flamboyant performance artist, who encouraged her to pursue music and introduced her to the Roland MC-505—a MIDI controller, music sequencer, and drum machine. M.I.A. soon began learning her way around the instrument. She adopted her stage name in memory of her cousin, who was missing in action and presumed dead amid the turmoil of the Sri Lanka Civil War.

After returning home to London, M.I.A. composed and recorded a six-song demo that included the single “Galang,” which was released by the independent Showbiz Records label in 2003 and spread like wildfire through dance clubs and fashion shows. As M.I.A. rapidly gained a following, she began uploading music through her MySpace account in 2004, becoming one of the first artists to build a following through egalitarian channels independent of the traditional music industry. She signed to XL Recordings in 2004, and her debut studio album *Arular* (translated loosely as “enlightenment from the sunshine”—a reference to her father Arul’s revolutionary ideals) came out the following year. The album boasted a variety of world music influences, including funk carioca, dancehall, jungle, and electro. M.I.A. soon began supporting her release through international festival and club shows. Her next album, *Kala* (named after her mother), pushed her over the top with singles “Boyz” and “Paper Planes,” the latter of which at the time ranked as the seventh bestselling song by a British artist in the digital age.



Throughout her work, M.I.A. has drawn inspiration from a variety of genres and geographies, often recording all over the world. Her lyricism and visual imagery center on themes of immigration, identity politics, classism, and sexual empowerment. Constantly breaking the pop music mold and making no apologies in the process, M.I.A.

has consistently advocated for refugees and civilians in war-torn areas, and has publicly and privately supported a variety of causes relating to education, rehabilitation, and legal advocacy for vulnerable communities.

“I spent my first thirty years as a drummer constantly adjusting myself to fit into what I now see was a boys’ club. I’ve been working to help create a more welcoming and balanced environment for the next generation of women musicians. . . . The time to close the gender gap is now.”

—TERRI LYNE CARRINGTON

Laura Jane Grace

NOVEMBER 8, 1980 -

Laura Jane Grace is an American singer-songwriter, guitarist, record producer, trans activist, and founder of the punk rock band Against Me!. Born in Chattahoochee County, Georgia, she moved frequently throughout her childhood; her father, a U.S. Army major, was relocated every few years to military bases in Texas, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Germany, and Italy. Although she was assigned male at birth, Laura's earliest memories were of gender dysphoria; she identified strongly with role models like Madonna and Mia Farrow and started trying on her mother's nylon stockings in secret. Music became a coping mechanism, and she dove headfirst into the catalog of bands like Guns N' Roses, Def Leppard, and Poison. At eight, she bought her first guitar with money saved from mowing lawns, teaching herself power chords and notes by ear.

When she was twelve, Laura's parents divorced, and she moved with her mother and younger brother to Naples, Florida, to live with her grandmother. Laura felt like an outsider in her new surroundings. After an upsetting altercation with the police when she was fourteen years old, she began to identify strongly with the anarchistic politics of punk rock bands like the Crass, one of Laura's biggest musical influences. In her freshman year of high school, Laura met James Bowman, who would become the guitarist of Against Me!. The two became fast friends, bonding over their shared love of punk rock. Laura dropped out of high school at sixteen and began concentrating completely on zine-making, performing,

and songwriting. Her earliest songs focused on subjects like classism, political ideologies, and her own struggles with gender identity. She moved to Gainesville, Florida, the following year, and eventually persuaded James to do the same.

After releasing a few EPs, Against Me! added members Warren Oakes and James Bowman to become a full band. They released their debut full-length record *Against Me! Is Reinventing Axl Rose* in 2002 through the independent label No Idea Records. The band signed to Fat Wreck Chords the following year, and their 2005 release *Searching for a Former Clarity* was their first to break the Billboard 200 chart. Throughout the next several years, Against Me! achieved mainstream success, and Laura met and married Heather Hannoura, a visual artist, who gave birth to their daughter, Evelyn, in 2009. But Laura's struggles with gender dysphoria continued to plague her.

In May 2012, Laura came out as transgender. While this announcement caused some massive shifts in her personal life, Laura and Against Me! have gained a more diverse and widespread audience than ever before. The band's 2014 release, *Transgender Dysphoria Blues*, was the first to outwardly reference Laura's perspective on gender dysphoria, transitioning, and the experience of coming out. She remains one of rock music's most visible and outspoken advocates for transgender rights and LGBTQ-related causes.



ANUSHKA SHANKAR

JUNE 9, 1981–

Anoushka Shankar is a British-Indian sitar player, composer, and activist. She is the daughter of legendary sitar player Ravi Shankar and musician Sukanya Rajan, and her childhood was split among London, California, and Delhi. When she was seven years old, her father, Ravi, began teaching her to play the sitar. By age ten she was accompanying him on the tanpura, a long-necked drone instrument that provides a supportive, sonic atmosphere for the main melody, at his live performances. Anoushka acclimated to the stage, and made her own professional debut as a sitar player by age thirteen. At fourteen, she was touring the world with her father. She decided to pursue her career in music rather than attend college; and, after signing with EMI Records, she released her first solo album at seventeen. By twenty, Anoushka had earned her first Grammy nomination in the world music category, becoming the first Indian woman and youngest nominee to be shortlisted for the award. Her accomplishments as a female sitar player broke new ground for other aspiring female musicians in India, as the instrumental music industry there was typically male-dominated.

Anoushka has since released several solo albums and even written scores for Hollywood and Bollywood films alike. Her musical stylings have evolved over several years to reflect both her limitless interests, as she explores genres ranging from flamenco to electronica, and the versatility of the sitar itself. She has collaborated with artists across genres, including Norah Jones (her half-sister), Rodrigo y Gabriela, Herbie Hancock, and Thievery Corporation.

As an activist, Anoushka has spoken up for animal rights and feminist causes. In 2013, she lent her voice to the One Billion Rising campaign, sharing her own experience of sexual abuse as a child to bring awareness to the crisis of crime against women in India. In her video for the campaign, Anoushka shared that she had suffered repeated instances of groping, touching, verbal and physical abuse from a male friend of the family. She dedicated the video to Jyoti Singh, a female victim of gang rape and murder in India, as well as to her younger self: “I’m rising for the child in me who I don’t think will ever fully recover from what happened to me.”



Beyoncé

SEPTEMBER 4, 1981–

Beyoncé Giselle Knowles-Carter is an American singer, songwriter, philanthropist, entrepreneur, and activist who is one of the most influential and successful musicians of all time. Born and raised in Houston, Texas, Beyoncé began singing and performing at an early age with the encouragement of her Montessori dance instructor and her parents. She was deeply influenced by stars like Michael Jackson, Selena, Diana Ross, and Whitney Houston. She began competing in local talent shows and formed the group Girl's Tyme with childhood friends Kelly Rowland and LaTavia Roberson, which landed a performance on the nationally syndicated *Star Search* talent show competition in 1992. Although Girl's Tyme did not come away with a win, Beyoncé's father made the decision to quit his job in 1995 and manage the group full-time, traveling with them to several talent competitions around the country.

Her father's risky decision put significant financial strain on the family for the first few years, but after a false start with Elektra Records, Columbia Records signed the group in 1996, who had settled on a new name: Destiny's Child. Their first song appeared on the *Men in Black* film soundtrack, and their self-titled debut brought promising hints of success. But it was 1999's multiplatinum *The Writing's on the Wall* that skyrocketed the group to fame with singles like "Jumpin' Jumpin'," "Bills, Bills, Bills," and "Say My Name," the last of which went on to win two Grammys in 2001. Their third album, *Survivor*, was one of the most successful albums of all time by an all-female

group, selling over twelve million copies worldwide. Beyoncé stood out early on as a leader in Destiny's Child, showcasing her singular, technically impressive vocal range, command of rhythm, and raw belting power.

By the time Destiny's Child disbanded in 2006, Beyoncé was already a pop superstar in her own right. She had two solo albums under her belt, *Dangerously in Love* and *B'Day*, which both highlighted themes of female empowerment. That same year, she introduced her all-female touring band, Suga Mama, named for a song off *B'Day*. The group has continued to support all of Beyoncé's tours to date, including her 2018 Coachella performance. In 2010, the singer chose to end her managerial relationship with her father and founded Parkwood Entertainment, an entertainment and management company, establishing complete creative control over her career.

With Parkwood Entertainment, Beyoncé has disrupted the limitations of music industry conventions with "surprise" digital releases of her most recent albums, including cinematic components. *Beyoncé*, released in 2013, boasted seventeen music videos; 2016's *Lemonade* was accompanied by a sixty-five-minute feature film tackling themes of black female empowerment, grief, injustice, infidelity, and forgiveness. In recent years, she has become an outspoken advocate for feminism, racial justice, education, and social equality, and has aligned herself with countless progressive causes throughout her career, including gun control, criminal justice, climate change, and natural-disaster relief.



ANNIE CLARK

SEPTEMBER 28, 1982–

Anne Erin Clark, more widely known as Annie Clark or by her stage name, St. Vincent, is an American multi-instrumentalist, singer-songwriter, and producer, as well as one of the most innovative guitarists working today. Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Annie grew up in the suburbs of Dallas, Texas. After seeing the film *La Bamba* at age four, she became fascinated with the guitar. A shy and quiet kid, she often sought solace in classic rock, and she absorbed whatever was recommended by her local record store. At twelve, Annie finally got a guitar of her own, and she started to perform a few years later. She got an early taste of the musician's lifestyle, going on the road with her uncle Tuck Andress of the jazz duo Tuck & Patti when she was just fifteen years old.

Annie attended the Berklee College of Music, although she dropped out after two and a half years to join the Polyphonic Spree, a choral rock band from her hometown of Dallas. In 2006, she joined Sufjan Stevens's backing band, and started performing opening sets on his tours. After signing her first major record deal with the Beggars Banquet label in 2007, Annie went on to record five solo albums, each progressing in popularity

and acclaim. Her self-titled album won the 2015 Grammy Award for best alternative music album.

As a guitarist and arranger, Annie demonstrates myriad influences in her playing style, from jazz and Disney film soundtracks to metal, classical, and grunge music. Her experimental arrangements combine with emotionally driven pop melodies to create a singular sound that is further amplified by the theatrical visuals that accompany her live performances. Often compared to classic rock guitar greats like Jimmy Page or Jimi Hendrix, Annie continues to expand the boundaries of rock music as a guitar hero for the new millennium. In addition to her own work, Annie has collaborated with the likes of David Byrne, the National, the Chemical Brothers, Jenny Lewis, Andrew Bird, the Mountain Goats, and many others. In 2016, she worked with the luthier Ernie Ball Music Man to release her very own signature guitar, designed to be gender-inclusive and ergonomic for all players. Her latest album, *Masseduction*, was released in 2017.



amy winehouse

SEPTEMBER 14, 1983–JULY 23, 2011

Amy Jade Winehouse was an iconic British jazz singer, songwriter, and guitarist with one of the most original voices of her generation.

Amy was born in northern London to a Jewish family, growing up in the suburb of Southgate. As a child, Amy had an early exposure to jazz music through her grandmother and uncles, who were professional musicians, as well as her father, who would often sing Frank Sinatra songs around the house. Some of Amy's biggest musical influences were Dinah Washington, Sarah Vaughan, Tony Bennett, and Thelonious Monk; she developed her vocal style not only by listening to other singers, but by imitating instrumentalists and soloists. In addition to her early love of classic jazz, she grew up listening to R&B and hip-hop artists like TLC and Salt-N-Pepa, and was fascinated by 1960s girl groups like the Ronettes.

In her teenage years, Amy struggled with depression and bulimia, and music became her most positive and productive outlet. Amy drew inspiration as a songwriter from legendary writers like Carole King and James Taylor. Her lyrics were always deeply personal, often referencing her relationships and struggles while tying in humor to explore complex emotions.

When Amy was sixteen, her friend and fellow singer Tyler James passed along her demo tape of cover songs to his manager, Nick Shymansky. Nick took Amy under his wing, helping her secure studio time and encouraging

her to start writing her own songs by using her poetry as a lyrical backdrop. By 2002, she had landed a record deal with Island UK, a commercial publishing deal with EMI, and a management deal with 19 Entertainment. Legendary hip-hop producer Salaam Remi produced Amy's 2003 debut album, *Frank*, which earned critical acclaim for its seamless blend of jazz, pop, soul, and hip-hop.

Within the next few years, Amy began to deal with the complications of her growing fame and success. After moving to her own apartment in Camden in 2005, she met Blake Fielder-Civil, who introduced the singer to hard drugs and encouraged her already excessive alcohol habit. In late 2005, Amy's friends and management tried to persuade her to seek treatment and rehabilitation, but when her own father dismissed the need for her to do so, she pushed back and decided to switch management, ending her longtime partnership with Nick Shymansky. (This experience would later be referenced on her hit song "Rehab.")

Amy's on-and-off-again romance with Blake was turbulent, physically abusive, and very destructive, but it provided Amy with powerful inspiration for the collection of songs that would eventually become her follow-up album, *Back to Black*, released in October 2006. Produced by Mark Ronson and Salaam Remi, the collection of songs combined Amy's foundations in jazz and hip-hop with classic R&B and 1960s Motown-style



instrumentation and production. The album brought increased fame to Amy after its American debut, earning several Grammys, two Brit Awards, and several other industry awards. *Back to Black* would unfortunately be Amy's final studio album.

After years of extensive touring, continued personal strife, and instability, Amy tragically died from alcohol

poisoning at the age of twenty-seven. The singer has become a powerful influence for countless musicians including Adele, Lady Gaga, Florence and the Machine, and Future, among others, and is credited with broadening the definition of modern pop music.

“Art is activism. I believe the more often people with disabilities are represented in the media—music, art, written word, film, and dance—the easier it will be for our society to reach the tipping point wherein disability will come to mind easily when discussing diversity and equality.”

—GAELYNN LEA

Gaelynn Lea

JANUARY 21, 1984–

Gaelynn Lea is an American folk singer-songwriter, violinist, disability activist, public speaker, and educator from Duluth, Minnesota. Growing up with theater enthusiast parents, she fell in love with the art of performing at a very young age. She was born with osteogenesis imperfecta, a congenital disability also known as brittle bone disease, which causes bone and limb development issues. Despite the many challenges this disease presented, Gaelynn was encouraged by her fifth-grade orchestra teacher, Susan Sommerfeld, to pursue music after she received the only perfect score in her class on a music listening test. With Susan's help, she developed a technique that involved her positioning the violin like a cello, attaching the instrument's body to her foot to prevent slippage, and holding the bow similarly to a baseball bat.

In 2016, Gaelynn's song "Someday We'll Linger in the Sun" won NPR's highly competitive Tiny Desk Contest, which resulted in significant exposure and acclaim. The song features her use of an electric violin and looping pedal, which was a gift from friend and bandmate Alan Sparhawk, who Gaelynn has collaborated with in the band Murder of Crows since 2011. As a result of her

newly widespread audience, she and her husband, Paul, quit their day jobs, sold their house, and bought a van so she could perform and tour across the country. Gaelynn now tours internationally and maintains an ever-present voice in the disability community, often speaking publicly on disability issues and advocating for positive and inclusive social change. Her songwriting is influenced by her love of traditional fiddle tunes, Celtic and American folk music, combined with ambient and experimental instrumentation. In 2018, she released her third solo album, *Learning How to Stay*.



ALYNDAA LEE SEGARRA

FEBRUARY 26, 1987—

Alynda Lee Segarra is a Nuyorican* singer-songwriter, guitarist, and activist, best known as the leader of indie rock band Hurray for the Riff Raff. After her parents separated when she was two, she went to live with her aunt and uncle in the Bronx projects, where she grew up in a remarkably diverse community. As a teenager, Alynda experienced bullying and sought solace in the music of misfits like Marilyn Manson, Dead Kennedys, and Bikini Kill. She was particularly drawn to the Lower East Side punk scene, frequenting progressive DIY spaces like ABC No Rio and Nuyorican Poets Café, where she began developing her identity as a feminist and a poet. Her interest in beatnik and Nuyorican poetry led to a growing fascination with folk music; some of her specific influences include Pedro Pietri, Allen Ginsberg, and Woody Guthrie.

On the day after her seventeenth birthday, Alynda left home, hopping freight trains, squatting with fellow misfits, and traveling the country in perfect Guthrie form. After making stops throughout the West and the South, she eventually landed in New Orleans. There, she gained the tough skin of a performer in order to stand out among the city's competitive music scene, singing and playing washboard or banjo in a variety of jazz and blues bands, including the Dead Man Street Orchestra. Her formative years as a busker gave way to Hurray for the Riff Raff's first two albums, *It Don't Mean I Don't Love You* and *Young*

Blood Blues. In the following years, her band gained traction on British radio, and in 2012 they released *Look Out Mama* on their own label, Born to Win Records, produced by Andrija Tokic from Alabama Shakes. But it was the band's 2013 album, *My Dearest Darkest Neighbor*, which showcased Alynda's expressive vocals and impressive interpretations, that landed the band a deal with ATO Records. The label released Hurray for the Riff Raff's *Small Town Heroes* in 2014, bringing the band widespread critical acclaim. That same year, Alynda's song "The Body Electric" was named Political Song of the Year by NPR and the number one song of the year by *American Songwriter*.

Alynda's songwriting style is heavily influenced by her own Puerto Rican heritage, political activism, and musical heroes like Nina Simone. The singer has been a strong advocate for the LGBTQ community, immigrants, the Black Lives Matter movement, and many other progressive causes. Hurray for the Riff Raff released *The Navigator* in 2016, a personal, politically charged concept album focused on the Puerto Rican diaspora. She is a crucial voice in America's community of contemporary songwriters, expanding on the work of activist folk musicians of prior generations like Buffy Sainte-Marie and Joan Baez.

* A member of the Puerto Rican diaspora living in New York City.



Venzella Joy Williams

JUNE 15, 1988–

Venzella Joy Williams, known by many as Joy, is an American drummer who provides world-class beats to none other than Beyoncé. Born in Lockport, New York, and raised in Buffalo, Joy discovered rhythm as a small child, clapping her hands at church and tapping her feet constantly. Noticing Joy's innate interest in drumming, her father gifted her a small electronic drum kit at the tender age of six. At ten, she came downstairs on Christmas Day to find a shiny, bright red drum set waiting for her. Joy soon started practicing for six to eight hours a day, studying various drumming exercises, techniques, and paging through books to master her chosen instrument. She learned to read music in her elementary school band, and further developed her skill and personal sound once she began playing at her church. In addition to her growing prowess as a drummer, Joy expanded her musicianship through Heaven Bound, a gospel band she started at age thirteen with her sister and two other girls from church. The band explored different types of instrumentation, and experimented with irregular time signatures. Through it all, Joy continued to develop her understanding of the dynamics of being part of a band—including the importance of silent beats that let the other musicians shine.

After completing high school, Joy made the pragmatic decision to study criminal justice as well as music at Canisius College. She continued to perform

throughout her time there, joining the college jazz ensemble. In 2009, after the difficult loss of her mother, Joy auditioned not once but twice for Diddy's television show *Making His Band*. It was through this show that Joy befriended fellow drummer Derek Dixie, who also auditioned for *Making His Band* and went on to become Beyoncé's music director. In early 2014, Derek reached out with the news that Beyoncé's band was seeking a drummer. Joy performed with Queen Bey's all-female band for the first time at Michelle Obama's fiftieth birthday party at the White House, followed by a European leg of the Mrs. Carter World Tour and the Mrs. Carter: On the Run Tour.

Joy currently lives in Los Angeles, and when she's not working with Beyoncé, she's leading drum clinics, acting, producing, and writing her own music. She is one of the most sought-after session musicians in the industry, having worked with artists like Patti LaBelle, Janelle Monáe, Jennifer Hudson, and many more. In the tradition of Terri Lyne Carrington, Joy's story and widespread visibility provide remarkable representation for aspiring musicians of color from all over the world.



FURTHER RESOURCES

There are countless articles, podcasts, books, films, and all kinds of media available about these amazing musicians; I've included a curated list of some of my favorite selections here. The list is not exhaustive, but I found these resources particularly engaging and interesting—fellow music- and history-obsessives might do the same! Enjoy.

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EDITH PIAF

NINA SIMONE

Chavela **VARGAS**



Patti Smith

SISTER

ROSETTA

THARPE

Each of the fifty artists in this book defied genre and social convention to shape the music industry as we know it. Yet many of these incredible women have been overlooked or cast in supporting roles in their own stories.

Not anymore. Author and illustrator Rachel Frankel shines a spotlight on each musician, bringing her to life with a vivid portrait and insightful biography. Celebrate the lives and achievements of the innovators and idols who paved the way for a new generation of fearless, talented performers. They might even inspire you to get out there and make some noise.

RACHEL FRANKEL is an author, illustrator, and designer living in Portland, Oregon. She also sings and plays guitar in a band called Phosphene. This is her first book.

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