

# My Favorite Women Composers of All Time

Here's a list of my favorite women composers I made with only my CD collection as reference (in no particular order; all from the U.S. unless indicated otherwise). I provide this because many of the women composers I like best are not found in reference works, even those specifically devoted to women. - Kyle Gann

**Ruth Crawford (Seeger)** (1901-1953) - the first great woman composer; student of Henry Cowell and wife of innovative musicologist Charles Seeger, she turned their theories into gently atonal music of great expressive power

**Laurie Anderson** - the premiere performance artist, a radically innovative singer, violinist, and electronic musician who created her own theatrical world and picked up a large following among rock fans

**Meredith Monk** - highly original vocalist/dancer whose playful minimalist voices processes climaxed in one of the most beautiful of 20th-century operas: Atlas, loosely based on the life of scientist Alexandra David-Neel

**Janice Giteck** - composer of deeply spiritual music that blends together influences from many world traditions: Balinese, East European, Jewish, American Indian

**Beth Anderson** - composer of ravishing, folk-music-influenced, postminimalist collages, called "swales"; also of energetic sound-text poetry

**Bernadette Speach** - New York composer influenced by jazz and Morton Feldman, writes text works with poet Thulani Davis

**Maria De Alvear** - Spanish composer of long meditative works full of repeated notes and chords, with references to nature and sex; lives in Berlin

**Elodie Lauten** - electronic improviser of mystical tendencies, whose thick, repetitive contrapuntal textures are inspired by astrology and the I Ching

**Pamela Z** - innovative African-American performance artist who combines simple rock tunes with low-tech electronics and wry humor

**Patricia Repar** - Canadian-born, New Mexico resident composer of political theater pieces and beautifully sensuous electronic works

**Gloria Coates** - highly original and too-neglected symphonist whose Fourth and Seventh Symphonies are marked by effective textures of undulating string glissandos

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**Diamanda Galas** - searing performance artist with a voice of amazing range and consummately operatic control; since the mid-'80s, her pieces have protested AIDS in satires of popular genres and frightening theatrical gestures

**Laurie Spiegel** - one of the world's most sophisticated experts in computerized sound, inventor of Music Mouse, and composer of subtle, complex, slowly climaxing synthesizer works

**Annea Lockwood** - conceptualist who started out in the '60s burning pianos and sinking them into swamps with contact microphones attached; more recently, she's made pieces from tapes of the Hudson River, amplified cat's purring, etc.

**Joan Tower** - composer of deeply organic chamber and orchestral works that often deal with textural metamorphosis

**Eve Beglarian** - versatile performance artist and composer whose vocal and synthesizer works, ranging from low-tech to extremely sophisticated, often take earlier music as a springboard

**Linda Fisher** - electronic musician known for a series of vocal/electronic works based on women scientists

**Alice Shields** - electronic composer of mystical, Hindu-influenced operas (and also an opera singer herself of Wagnerian talents)

**Lois Vierk** - prolific composer of chamber music based on glissandos, strange textural effects, and slowly climaxing forms

**Laetitia De Compiegne Sonami** - French-born composer of whimsical electronic music, often triggered by the humorously mysterious narratives of Melody Sumner Carnahan (a brilliant novelist popular among new-music composers)

**Mary Ellen Childs** - composer of delightful postminimalist music

**Maria Panayotova** - Bulgarian-American composer of folk-song-flavored vocal music, more recently involved in nature-oriented music video

**Nancy Van De Vate** - composer of tense, coloristic orchestral music, conservative but powerful

**Pauline Oliveros** - the grand old lady of new music, pioneer of meditation music, avant-garde accordionist, versatile improviser, and general new-music rabble rouser

**Sarah Hopkins** - Australian cellist whose music acts as meditative physical therapy

**Caroline Mallonée** - a composer of brash but thoughtful postminimalist music

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**Victoria Jordanova** - Yugoslavian composer of sound collages

**Maryanne Amacher** - composer of huge, site-specific sound installations, sculptural, surround-sound, noisy, extremely loud, with low tones that rumble through your stomach; a temperamental perfectionist, she shows primarily in Europe

**Eliane Radigue** - composer of thick, electronic drone pieces with swirling overtones, often based on spoken Tibetan texts

**Andrea LaRose** - a flutist-composer connected with the Antisocial Music collective, whose works experiment with unconventional performance situations and notations

**Terri Hron** - recorder player, early music expert, improviser, and composer of incredibly rhythmically complex yet listenable music based in classical Indian techniques

**Alexandra Gardner** - composer of earthily evocative and meditative electronic works

**Joan Tyler** - cellist and composer of rhythmically exciting orchestral works

**Elise Kermani** - improvising soprano with an elegant theatrical sense, using electronic effects to transform odd vocal techniques

**Mary Jane Leach** - minimalist composer previously known for works made for many multiples of one instrument (e.g., eight bassoons), more recently for scintillating choral works

**Barbara Benary** - minimalist composer who often works with Balinese gamelan and theatrical forms derived from Asian music

**Karissa Krenz** - sardonic composer of politically oriented tape and vocal pieces

**Diana Meckley** - composer of complex but accessible electronic chamber music based on chaos theory

**Wendy Chambers** - composer of huge works for multiple instruments, such as 100 timpani or 77 trombones

**Susan Parenti** - performance artist whose theater and tape pieces explore differences in male and female speech patterns

**Allison Cameron** - totalist (postminimalist) composer whose accessible works involve elegant number systems and subtle beat patterns

**Ellen Band** - conceptualist sound artist

**Carolyn Yarnell** - composer of large orchestral and chamber works, romantically emotive or relentlessly angry by turns

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**Jody Diamond** - expert on Balinese and Javanese music who composes works for gamelan ensemble

**Milica Paranosic, Danijela Popovic, Aleksandra Vojcic** - three Belgrade-born, Juilliard-trained composers whose darkly dramatic music for keyboards and electronics, based in postminimalism and Slavic folk traditions, tends toward film and performance art

**Yoko Ono** - important figure in early Fluxus movement, composer of clever conceptual pieces and conceptualist filmmaker

**Judy Dunaway** - improviser and singer/songwriter best known for her spine-tingling work with amplified balloons

**Wendy Griffiths** - young rock-trained composer of subtle chamber works

**Ellen Fullman** - composer who performs on extremely long, well-tuned wires

**Susan Stenger** - flutist/guitarist leader of the minimalist noise group, Band of Susans

**Bunita Marcus** - expert postminimalist influenced by Morton Feldman

**Belinda Reynolds** - composer of charming postminimalist works

**Johanna Magdalena Beyer** (1880-1944) - born in Leipzig, one of the earliest pioneers of electronic and percussion music; she worked as Henry Cowell's secretary and suffered from Lou Gehrig's disease, dying without having heard most of her incredibly original, proto-minimalist music

**Julia Wolfe** - composer of highly coloristic postminimalist works for ensemble, whose melodies often grow from a single sonority

**Maggi Payne** - electronic minimalist of swirling geometric patterns

**Frankie Mann** - electronic composer with a strong satirical bent and a tendency to protest stereotypes of American society

**Peggy Glanville Hicks** (1912-1990) - neoclassic composer whose orchestral and operatic works were influenced by Indian and ancient Greek music

**Shelley Hirsch** - mercurial vocal improviser who performs over chaotic tape collages, often switching styles in mid-phrase

**Alison Knowles** - Fluxus artist of poetic soundworks

**Joan LaBarbara** - virtuoso soprano who makes tape works with postminimal processes

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**Lenore Von Stein** - singer of strange stream-of-consciousness song collages**Other current women composers:**

Vivian Fine, Anne LeBaron, Pril Smiley Delson, Ellen Taafe Zwillich, Shulamit Ran, Betsy Jolas, Layne Redmond, Sheila Silver, Miriam Gideon, Eleanor Cory, Melinda Wagner, Katherine Hoover, Laura Kaminsky, Amy Rubin, Ruth Anderson, Mary Wright, Kaija Saariaho (Finland), Faye-Ellen Silverman, Eleanor Hovda, Barbara Kolb, Elizabeth Vercoe, Sofia Gubaidulina (Russia), Adriana Holszky (Germany), Julie Spencer, Anne La Berge, Kathryn Alexander, Judith Shatin, Susan Blaustein, Marti Epstein, Linda Bouchard (Canadian), Bun-Ching Lam, Joyce Mekeel, Thea Musgrave (Scottish), Wendy Carlos, Chen Yi, Elma Mayer, Melissa Hui

**Women composers of previous eras:**

Hildegard von Bingen (Germany, 12th century), Amy (Mrs. H.H.A.) Beach (1867-1944), Sophia Corri Dussek, Clara Schumann (Germany, 1819-1896), Germaine Tailleferre (France, 1892-1983), Lili Boulanger (France, 1893-1918), Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel (Germany, 1805-1847), Cecile Chaminade (France, 1857-1944), Teresa Carreno (Venezuela, 1853-1917), Francesca Caccini (Italy, 1587-c.1640), Marianne Martines (1744-1812), Camilla de Rossi (early 18th century)

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