Women in Electronic Music

Materials related to “Women in Electronic Music” in the collections of the Center for Popular Music, Middle Tennessee State University

Compiled by: Tiffany Minton, March 2020

Understanding This Research Guide

What is Electronic Music?

Electronic music includes compositions made using electronic, digital or circuitry-based instruments and technologies. Some electronic sounds may be produced using electronics themselves (e.g. tape reply keyboards, synthesizers, samplers, and theremins) or technologies that manipulate acoustic sounds using signal processing (e.g. audio effects like reverb, echo and stereo imaging). Circuit bending is a technique used to manipulate electronics using short-circuiting techniques in order to create new, unusual or non-native electronic sounds.

Why does researching women in Electronic Music matter?

A 2019 report titled, “Inclusion in the Recording Studio?” by Stacy L. Smith Ph.D at the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, found that between 2012-2018, women’s representation in the music industry decreased significantly. Using quantitative and qualitative analysis, Smith’s study surveyed the gender and race (or ethnicity) of artists and producers who created 700 of the most popular songs on the Billboard Hot 100 year-end charts between 2012-2018. The report studied gender across this seven year span, tracing Grammy nominations in categories for Record of the Year, Album of the Year, Song of the Year, Producer of the Year, and Best New Artist. The investigation also examined the barriers female songwriters and producers face using qualitative interviews with the creators.

Across this seven year span, 21.7% of artists were female, 2017 showing the starkest decrease at 16.8 %. Small changes were observed in the percentage of women
working as artists in 2018 at 17%. From 2012 to 2018, women were most likely to appear on the charts as individual performers (31.5 % of all artists) rather than in duos (4.6 % of all artists) or in bands (7.5 % of all artists). In this same time, artists from underrepresented racial or ethnic groups represented half of 2019’s artists; people of color represented 44% of the over 1,400 artists included in the study. By comparison, this demonstrates that the music industry is much better at inclusion when considering issues of race and ethnicity, rather than gender.

Dr. Smith’s research demonstrates that stories about marginalized people and groups can reveal new questions and opportunities for understanding. These marginalized stories reveal larger truths about whose histories get told or silenced and why; as well as what the implications of telling and silence might have on the historical record. Attempting to understand the effects of these inclusions or absences can help us better understand the complicated and varied truths about individuals, ourselves and our collective experiences, either currently or in the past and deepen our personal or shared memories.

**What can this “Women in Electronic Music” research guide do for me?**

This guide demonstrates just a few of the innumerable ways history, and the study of music more generally, might be understood by framing women’s experiences as musicians, producers, songwriters, and creatives in electronic music within your research. Types of primary and secondary sources include: sheet music, rare books, performance documents, sound recordings, video recordings, manuscript collections, and trade magazines.

The guide is formatted as a bibliography (Chicago style, 17th ed.) and divided into broad categories: *General Knowledge; The Beginning and Early Years; Freestyle/Miami/Latin EDM, Women as Creators and Co-creators: Electronic Music Musicians, Producers, Fans, and Critics; and Important Cultural Figures: Related Sub-Topics.*

Each category includes examples of primary and secondary source material housed at the CPM that could be used to frame one of these aspects of electronic music culture in recent or earlier popular music history. For example, The Lisa A. Lewis Video Collection could be read against the digitized videos from the *Youth Empowerment Through Arts & Humanities (YEAH) Collection* to understand more about the nuanced history of girls and women as electronic music creators.

Additional research materials have been included at the end of the guide (*Other Databases and Online Repositories; Syllabi & Other Academic Resources*).
These are just a few examples of ways primary and secondary documents at the Center for Popular Music can be sourced to encourage deeper, critical and creative insights about women’s experiences in various related histories. What the sources say is up to you, the researcher, to determine and argue.

**What will you uncover in our library and archive that interests you?**

What will these sources say about music, history or the culture and society we live in today that hasn’t been said before or could be said differently?
“How do I search for primary source materials in your archive?”

Online Searching:

Most of these primary source materials may be searched online through the Center’s website. Sound recordings may be searched in the Center’s Reading Room through the in-house database.

To search for these materials online, visit the CPM’s website. This catalog will search for materials in the following collection categories: Manuscript Collections, Rare Books and Scores; Sheet Music; Song Broadsides; Posters, Playbills, and Programs; Trade Catalogs; Photographs; and Periodicals: Secondary Collection.

For an overview of each of the major collections, see the detailed menu to the left of the screen under “Search Our Collections.”

You should search for individual titles, artists or songs in Quick Search or Advanced Search. If you do not have any specific names in mind, you should first examine secondary source materials. Searching for terms like “electronic,” or “women in music,” or by genres like “dance” or “disco” will yield long lists of items that may or may not directly correlate to the topics.

Click on the Advanced Search link to take you to a more detailed search screen. You may limit your search to a particular field or type of material.
At the Center (in-house searching only):

To search for Sound Recordings, please visit the Center and use our in-house database or email Rachel Morris Rachel.Morris@mtsu.edu or Martin Fisher Martin.Fisher@mtsu.edu.

Some photographic and manuscript materials will also require staff assistance to locate. Please contact Rachel Morris with questions.
“What secondary source materials do you have?”

To search for Secondary Source Materials available in the Center’s Reading Room—go to MTSU’s Walker Library catalog and use search terms like “Electronic music,” “Gender in music” or “Bush, Kate.” If you need additional ideas for related search terms, Indiana University has provided a key based on the categories issued by The Library of Congress, here. You may also search for individual artists or genres. Materials include histories, song books and video.

If you are only interested in materials held at the CPM, click on “Library Catalog” at the bottom of the Search box.

Then select “Center for Popular Music (Mass Comm.)” under the “Collection” menu.
Electronic Dance Music Culture: General Knowledge

Primary Sources

Video

Lisa A. Lewis research videos collection


Sound Recordings


Manuscript Collections

Lisa A. Lewis Papers (see: “Series II: Research resources”)

Press Kit Collection (see: “Chaka Khan, Cher, Club Nouveau, Depeche Mode, Enya, Erasure, Joy Division, Madonna, New Order, Peter Gabriel, and Donna Summer” et al)

Secondary Sources

Books


The Beginning and Early Years

Secondary Sources

Books

Freestyle/Miami/Latin EDM

Primary Sources

Sound Recordings


Trade Catalogs


Women as Creators and Co-creators and related subtopics: electronic music musicians, producers, fans, and critics

Primary Sources

Song Books

**Manuscript Collections**

- [Lisa A. Lewis Papers](#) (see: “Series II: Research resources”)
- [Press Kit Collection](#) (see: “Madonna, New Order, and Donna Summer” et al)
- [Youth Empowerment Through Arts & Humanities (YEAH) Collection](#) (see: “Administrative Records – Digital files, DVD-R, CD-R (Box 4)"

**Women In American Musical Life Symposium**

- [Video](#)
- [Lisa A. Lewis Research Videos Collection](#)

**Secondary Sources**

- **Books**

Important Cultural Figures: related sub topics

Laurie Anderson

Secondary Sources

Books

Björk

Primary Sources

Audio

Performance Documents
Glastonbury Festival Fleadh Phoenix Festival Womad T in the Park Felle [program Book], 1994. | Call Number: PERFORM-000414 - Perform Box No. 7

Books

Secondary Sources

Books

• Marsh, Charity and Melissa West, “The Nature/Technology Binary Opposition Dismantled in the Music of Madonna and Björk”


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**Kate Bush**

**Primary Sources**

**Books**


**Sound Recordings**


**Secondary Sources**
**Books**


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**Wendy Carlos**

**Primary Sources**

**Trade Catalogs**


**Sound Recordings**


Gillian Gilbert (New Order)

Secondary Sources

Books

Madonna

Primary Sources

Performance Documents

Sound Recordings

Secondary Sources

Books


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**Sylvia Robinson**

**Secondary Sources**

**Books**


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**Donna Summer**

**Primary Sources**

**Books**


**Sound Recordings**

More Archival Resources

Other Databases and Online Repositories:

Encyclopedia of Popular Music, 4th Ed.

Internet Archive

Library of Congress

Open Culture

Oxford Music Online

Rock and Roll Hall of Fame

Wendy Carlos (Official Wendy Carlos Online Information Source)

Women’s Liberation Music Archive

Women’s Music Archives records and collected music at Smith College

Other General Resources and Recommended Reading:

Pink Noises: Women On Electronic Music and Sound
