



Changing the Narrative: Piano Teachers' Role as Advocates for Female Composers

Jennifer Boster, NCTM



Recommendations: Music by Female Composers

Published Collections of Various Composers:

At the Piano with Women Composers, edited by Maurice Hinson, published by Alfred
Women Composers in History, edited by Gail Smith, published by Hal Leonard
Women at the Piano, edited by Nicholas Hopkins, published by Carl Fischer
Woman Composers: Three Centuries of Keyboard Works, edited by Eleanor Gummer
(oneeyepublications.com)
Mothers of Music – upcoming collection by UMTA member Camille Weber

Published Works of Individual Composers:

Many books are published but often hard to find at music stores – check online sellers.
Publishers such as Dover, Hal Leonard, Schirmer, Alfred, Bärenreiter, G. Henle Verlag Urtext
and Breitkopf

Hildegard Publishing Company, Hildegard.com

Excellent resource with huge selection of works by female composers.

JWPepper.com seems to have a good selection as well – search female composer names to find
available publications.

Piano Rare Scores, pianorarescores.com

A web-library where you can purchase rare piano scores digitally, includes over 60 female
composers.

IMSLP.org

Huge free resource that includes many, many works by female composers.

Piano Music She Wrote, pianomusicshewrote.com

Two pianists who have catalogued all of the piano music written by women available for free
download at IMSLP.org. Pay for access to their huge and growing database; follow them on
YouTube for recordings of works available on IMSLP. Amazing resource!

Further Reading & Learning: Books, Websites, Resources

- The Norton/Grove Dictionary of Women Composers
- Sounds and Sweet Airs by Anna Beer

- Women Composers: The Lost Tradition Found by Diane Peacock Jezic
- From Spirituals to Symphonies: African-American Women Composers and Their Music by Helen Walker-Hill
- Unsung: A History of Women in American Music by Christine Ammer
- Stories of Women Composers for Young Musicians by Catherine Wolff Kendall
- Shades of Sound: Women Composers – A Listening & Coloring Book for Pianists by Jennifer Boster
- Shades of Sound: Women Composers Volume 2 – A Listening & Coloring Book for Pianists by Jennifer Boster
- Year of Wonder by Clemency Burton-Hill (*not specifically about women but one of the most inclusive music history books I have seen, with about 12% of the music by women – not super great but much higher than many other music history books*)
- Boulanger Initiative – boulangerinitiative.org
- Women Composers: A Database by the Kapralova Society - <http://www.kapralova.org/DATABASE.htm>
- Composer Chaos Game: Women Composers Add-On – Keys to Imagination (keystoimagination.com)

Female Composers You Should Know

This list focuses on composers who have written **works for piano**, whose works may be useful in your teaching. There are many, many, many more and this list is by no means exhaustive. It is, rather, a great place to start!

Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre, b. 1665
 Marianna von Martines, b. 1744
 H el ene de Montgeroult, b. 1764
 Maria Szymanowska, b. 1789
 Louise Farrenc, b. 1804
 Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, b. 1805
 Emilie Mayer, b. 1812
 Clara Schumann, b. 1819
 Sophie Menter, b. 1846
 Agathe Backer-Gr ondahl, b. 1847
 Teresa Carre no, b. 1853
 Cecile Chaminade, b. 1857
 Ethel Smyth, b. 1858
 Mel Bonis, b. 1858
 Amy Beach, b. 1867

Nannie Louise Wright, b. 1879
 Adeline Shepherd, b. 1883
 Dora Peja evi , b. 1885
 Paula Szalit, b. 1886
 Florence Price, b. 1887
 Germaine Tailleferre, b. 1892
 Lili Boulanger, b. 1893
 Zara Levina, b. 1906
 Margaret Bonds, b. 1913
 Eugenie Rocherolle, b. 1939
 Judith Lang Zaimont, b. 1945
 Alexina Louie, b. 1949
 June Armstrong, b. 1951
 Unsuk Chin, b. 1961
 Lera Auerbach, b. 1973

Female Composers Quiz

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Questions & Answers

She was professor of piano at the Paris Conservatory for 30 years. After a composition earned lots of publicity, she finally demanded (& received!) equal pay to the men. Her set of 30 etudes was required repertoire for piano students at the conservatory.

Louise Farrenc

(other options: Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre, H el ene de Montgeroult, Nadia Boulanger)

A brilliant piano virtuoso who lived during the French Revolution & the 1st female professor at the Paris Conservatory; she made huge contributions to pedagogy and was one of the first people to teach that the piano can sing and imitate singers’ voices.

H el ene de Montgeroult

(other options: Germaine Tailleferre, Louise Farrenc, Cecile Chaminade)

A piano prodigy with an amazing memory who had a seven-decade career as a composer. She was the only female in a group of prominent French composers in the 1920s who made enormous contributions to French music. Satie called her his “musical daughter.”

Germaine Tailleferre

(other options: Marie Bigot, Henriette-Caroline Mennechet de Barival, Lili Boulanger)

A Soviet-born child prodigy known for her children’s songs; she worked with Kabalevsky on the Children’s Music Committee. She wrote many piano & larger scale works. Her powerful music was full of drama and melancholy with a hint of optimism.

Zara Levina

(other options: Dora Peja cevi c, Sofia Gubaidulina, Lera Auerbach)

The 1st African-American to have a symphony performed by a major orchestra, she was a pianist, organist & composer of >300 works (many for piano). She supported her family by teaching, playing organ for silent movies & composing commercial jingles.

Florence Price

(other options: Margaret Bonds, Undine Smith Moore, Julia Perry)

A prolific 19th century German composer who wrote 8 symphonies, 7 overtures, 7 string quartets & much more. She was an exact contemporary of Wagner but has been almost completely erased from history. Her symphonies are full of power and beauty.

Emilie Mayer

(other options: Emma Lou Diemer, Sophie Menter, Marianna von Martines)

She was the youngest recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 2013. She's collaborated w/artists like Kanye West & Sara Bareilles, is a creative associate at the Juilliard School & is breaking down barriers between classical & popular music.

Caroline Shaw

(other options: Jessie Montgomery, Jennifer Higdon, Missy Mazolli)

This child prodigy went on to have a successful career as a concert pianist. She was so popular that police had to help control the crowd, and she often had up to thirteen curtain calls. She was also a mother of eight.

Clara Schumann

(other options: Amy Beach, Alice Mary Smith, Nannie Louise Wright)

This Polish pianist and composer composed nocturnes, polonaises, mazurkas, preludes and waltzes. She toured all over Europe, moved to Russia and became the court pianist to the Tsar. Goethe fell madly in love with her.

Maria Szymanowska

(other options: Paula Szalit, Pinar Toprak, Dora Pejačević)

She composed over 32 fugues by the time she was 19. In her short lifetime she wrote over 460 pieces. She faced a lot of opposition from her father & brother in pursuing her career. However, her husband, a painter, encouraged her to compose & publish.

Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel

(other options: Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre, Emilie Mayer, Agathe Backer-Grøndahl)

An internationally-recognized composer & feminist, she was the 1st woman to have an opera performed at the Met in NYC. She wrote 6 operas & was a main representative of the suffrage movement. Her music is strikingly original & bold.

Ethel Smyth

(other options: Imogen Holst, Elizabeth Maconchy, Louise Talma)

The first Croatian to write a concerto & the first Croatian woman to write orchestral music, this woman grew up in a castle. Her music is late Romantic in style with a splash of impressionism & lush orchestral colors. Her piano works are gorgeous.

Dora Pejačević

(other options: Meri Davitashvili, Paula Szalit, Maria Szymanowska)

As a toddler she would harmonize with her mother's lullabies. She started composing at age four. She was the first American woman to compose and publish a symphony.

Amy Beach

(other options: Florence Price, Jennifer Higdon, Judith Weir)

A superstar piano virtuoso & protégé of Liszt who composed sparkling virtuosic piano works, this woman purchased a castle to live in & had over 50 cats. Liszt called her his “piano daughter.” She had a killer work ethic, practicing 10 to 12 hours per day!

Sophie Menter

(other options: Agathe Backer-Grøndahl, Marianna von Martines, Emilie Mayer)

She was the daughter of a Russian princess and an opera composer, and the first woman to conduct the London Philharmonic Orchestra. She had a huge impact on 20th century music through her teaching, training composers like Copland, Bernstein & Glass.

Nadia Boulanger

(other options: Germaine Tailleferre, Lili Boulanger, Cecile Chamiande)