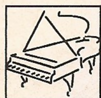
Baptist Church in Los Angeles and created a gospel masterpiece. Recently reissued as *Amazing Grace: The Complete Recordings* (Rhino), this double CD is a smoldering and flamboyant document of great gospel singing. Classic proof of gospel's belief that despite life's burdens, humanity can and should move on up. Z



Music

Women's Music 101

By Jennifer Baumgardner

Recently I saw a Pratibha Parmar documentary at the New Festival called Righteous Babes, which attempted to chronicle the relationship between contemporary rock and roll and feminism. With women sweeping the Grammys and raking in mucho dinero on the summer festival scene, it seems fair to say that this generation of feminists are expressing themselves through rock music and getting tools and confidence to ward off the patriarchy through the same. It's a revolution and it began with Chrissie Hynde and Madonna, Queen Latifa, and Sinead O'Connor.

The feminist historian Gerda Lerner once said that the only continuous thread in women's history is that it is constantly lost and recovered, lost and recovered. Therefore, it always seems as if big leaps for women's rights sprung fully formed, like Athena, out of the head of some daddy-figure who got there first, and with no connection to the radical women who laid the groundwork. Witness the second wave: In the late 1960s, many of the women who became the leaders of feminism were rooted in male-led civil rights and Students for Democratic Society movements. They honed their revolutionary skills while getting sexually harassed and confined to coffee-girl and typing duty. Still, they initially felt no relationship to the "blue stockings," the radical suffragists who marched for women's rights 100 years earlier decked out in hideously unfashionable leg wear.

Now it's 1999, and the fear of being called a bluestocking has been replaced by the second wave progeny's distrust of being a (hairy, humorless, possibly gay) "feminist." Similarly, among female recording artists in a male-dominated business, there is the terror of having one's work labeled "women's music," and thus binned with records by "cheesy singer-songwriters" of the 1970s who, the stereotype goes, played kumbaya folk while wearing overalls, smocks, and terrible bi-level haircuts. So, to elaborate on the insight of Gerda Lerner, another distinguishing feature of women's history is that fear of being identified as "dorky" or "gay" precipitates our dropping the reins on huge chunks of history.

Twenty years before Lilith Fair was a twinkle in founder Sarah McLachlan's eye, the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival was bringing female acts, all the way down to the bands and crew, to a female audience. Three years before Michigan put the "y" in a word that didn't know it needed one, there was an XY-free music festival held annually in Champagne-Urbana. Seventeen years before Ani DiFranco bucked the major labels by starting Righteous Babe, there was Olivia. Olivia Records was the first indie woman's label to train female engineers and producers but not the first label to be owned by a woman. A quarter century earlier Mary Lou Williams, a jazz pianist and composer, started Mary Records. You've heard of Lilith Fair and the fact that women dominated the Grammys in 1998, but do you know about the radical women who seeded this flower? Let's talk about Ladyslipper, Olivia, Michigan and Cris Williamson and, while we're at it, riot grrrl and Mr. Lady.

In 1976, feminism had just found its way to a commune in the rural South and Laurie Fuchs, age 24, was electrified. Then, after attending the women's music festival in Champagne-Urbana, she discovered her outlet. "Someone had gone to a Holly Near concert in Durham and brought an album back. It was the live one, and I wanted it," Fuchs recalls. "But there was no way to get one except from the artist in the lobby. That was distribution at the time."

Pondering this inability to find music by women who weren't the token Joni, Joan, or Judy led to doing some research. As it happened, Fuchs discovered a rich history of women taking control of their careers. A major label recorded Melvina Reynolds's music, for example, and then dumped her masters in a vault and never released them—a typical story at the time and even now. Elizabeth Cotten, a maid for the Seeger family, had written "Freight Train," later made famous by Peter, Paul and Mary. When Fuchs, now living in Durham, made visits to the libraries of University of North Carolina and Duke to expand her research, each library had a measly two or three recordings by women—"basically Bessie Smith and that's it"—among thousands and thousands by men. "I had this dawning realization that the history of women's music didn't not exist," says Fuchs. "It just wasn't documented. So I thought I'd start this tiny little mail order

business and take my table around to local events."

That year, Fuchs created a mail order catalog devoted to distributing women's music. She gleaned female artists from obscure folk and jazz labels and began distributing releases from new performers who were making music for, by, and about women. Fuchs realized that Ladyslipper had to function on two levels: uncover the history of women in music and make recordings by female artists available. "When I first started the catalog, I thought I could cover everything recorded by women," says Fuchs, laughing. "In the catalog right now, we run between 1,500 and 2,000 titles—it's more than we find other places but it doesn't begin to touch the entire body of work." Compared to huge independent distributors like Koch, Ladyslipper is small change but Fuchs manages to offer the world's most comprehensive annotated catalog of recordings by ladies from all genres—classical women who composed under anonymous, world music, punk, and, of course, "women's music." Women's music is where Fuchs began, distributing releases from a wave of new performers—Alix Dobkin, Ferron, Meg Christian, Cris Williamson—who were making music "for, by, and about women." Better, these women were bucking the rules about what they were allowed to look and sound like, and learning how to be engineers, back-up musicians, and producers. In short, a coalition of self-determining women in the music industry was being built. All of these new womyn were on indie labels (Women's Wax Works was Alix Dobkin's; Redwood was Holly Near's), but the most influential, most quintessential, most lesbionic label was Olivia Records.

Olivia, named for a feisty heroine in a pulp novel who fell in love with her headmistress at French boarding school, was the brainchild of ten radical feminists (Furies and Radicalesbians) living in Washington, DC. They wanted to create a feminist organization with an economic base so that activists wouldn't burn out or have to go find a "real" job, but they didn't know what this business should be. Meanwhile, an unknown singer-songwriter named Cris Williamson came to DC to do a show and was shaken to greet 300 to 400 women fans. "She became so non-plussed that she forgot the words to her song and out of the audience came this voice and it was Meg Christian singing it back to her," says Judy Dlugazc, a founder and current owner of Olivia. The next day, on the radio show, Sophie's Parlour, Cris suggested that it would be cool if women had their own label. Olivia was born.

In 1973, the collective put out a 45 with Meg Christian on one side and Cris Williamson on the other. Yoko Ono responded and said that she wanted to do a side project with Olivia, but the collective lovingly declined. "The image that we were projecting was that we had our own music and vision," Dlugazc recalls. "And I think we weren't smart enough at the time to realize that [Yoko] could have been a good thing." Without hooking up with anyone high-profile, they made $12,000 with that 45, enough to put out Meg's first record, and soon after, Williamson's—*The Changer and the Changed*.

The Changer and the Changed sold between 60,000 and 80,000 copies that first year. At present Olivia has sold over a third of a million and is still selling 5 to 6,000 copies annually. (Ani DiFranco's best-selling record has sold 240,000 copies). Williamson's album changed the alternative women's music scene, giving it an economic spine that supported Olivia, Ladyslipper, and countless feminist bookstores—*Changer* enabled them all to grow, connecting women through a record the same way Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* magnetized political women a few years earlier to begin fighting on their own behalf. Women's music became a movement.

Olivia moved to Los Angeles to be where the industry was at and then to Oakland. The remaining five women of the collective, who had been pooling their money and living together for the past seven years, began to disperse. The Reagan-Bush years hit, Olivia stopped putting out new records and performed a series of 15th anniversary concerts in 1988. The two at Carnegie Hall in New York were the largest grossing concerts at that venue in its history. The *Times* barely mentioned the show. Dlugazc, the remaining founder, was tired. Even though Olivia put out world music and salsa records, they were most successful with acoustic solo acts. The folk music that was cutting edge when she began Olivia was not going to be the music for the next generation of women. "To continue, we had to reinvent what we did and how we did it," she says. "And it didn't make real sense for us to do that." Olivia Records became Olivia, the lesbian cruise line, later that year. Meanwhile, Ladyslipper, which had fought for years to have separate bins in record stores for the genre of "Women's Music" was feeling that innovation backfire. Women's music felt like a ghetto and even a band as pro-feminist as the Indigo Girls chose not to be distributed by Ladyslipper.

Women's music is usually associated with a certain breed of (white middle-class lesbian) singer-songwriters with a guitar. If untangled from the claws of homophobia and internalized misog-

yny, the term actually refers not so much to a genre of music, but a consciousness. Laurie Fuchs defines women's music as "self-determined"—female artists taking control of their look, sound, profits, and career. Women's music also meant creating a female-focused audience, one in which women can both be the intended beneficiaries of the songs and feel safe to be swept away by the music. At a women's music concert, one perhaps need not worry about getting jacked in the face by an overzealous mosher or molested by a free-love Woodstock boy. By contrast, a recent Pearl Jam concert I attended is typical of the rock show atmosphere. Although Vedder and the boys are among the most enlightened megastars on the planet, all of the band members and opening acts were male, as was the vast majority of the buff and predatory audience. Shirtless boys jumped up and down in a frenzy, crowd surfed, and stuffed their faces full of chili dogs and beer at the concession stands. Very few women ventured into the cock-pit.

Riot grrrl seemed to spring out of nowhere, Athena-style again, with the media's discovery of the young punk feminists in 1992. In actuality, activists such as Kathleen Hanna and Tobi Vail (from the band Bikini Kill) were not only reacting to a boy dominated "boring" punk scene in Olympia and DC, they were drawing from feminist history. Hanna spent an entire semester studying *The Second Sex* in 1989 and worked at a battered women's shelter by day. By the time Bikini Kill and another band called Bratmobile moved to DC, they were actively soliciting a women's audience. "I was at the point when we were in Olympia where I didn't even want to go to shows anymore from getting harassed or guys rubbing up against you and feeling alienated by some of the music," says Hanna. "I really felt like the music I wanted to make was for women and so we had to make a specific attempt to reach out to them to come to our shows. We had a mailing list and sent postcards to people before we came to different towns: 'please come and bring friends and as many women as you can'."

A loose network of girl punk bands, zine-writers, and activists grew out of acts such as Hanna and Vail's. But true to Lerner's claim about women's history, by 1994, the media was already declaring riot grrrl over and strong women in punk and rock were distinguishing themselves from a label that suddenly felt too restrictive, too white, too trendy, too targeted. It was "women's music" all over again.

"Not wanting to identify as women's music is the same thing as not wanting to call yourself a feminist," says Kaia Wilson, 25, the singer/guitarist for the Butchies, former member of dyke punk band Team Dresch, and owner of Mr. Lady Records and Video (with her woman friend, video artist Tammy Rae Carland). "There can be really good reasons for not wanting to call yourself a feminist, but most of the time, it's due to misogyny. [Women's Music] is sort of like saying feminist music: strong women-identified women playing music. That doesn't necessarily fall into a genre but describes the people playing. To me, we are women's music."

Loads of other women are carrying on the spirit if not the name of the women's music movement. They own labels, produce shows, and organize mail order distribution so that girls and women can avoid the macho record store experience if they so desire. Some focus on producing records by women—such as Tinuviel, who founded the riot grrrl label Kill Rock Stars, and is now the owner of Boston's Villa Villakula label. As a punk teenager, she always felt intimidated and harassed by the self-perpetuating cool boy punk scene, especially in record stores. "I decided that instead of limiting myself to a genre, I'd limit myself to a gender," says Tinuviel, age 36. "I put out people's first projects and encourage girls to realize their projects. Instead of just saying 'Oh I wrote these songs once,' record them."

Tinuviel and some friends put out a zine, *Cakewalk*, in early 1997 that included advice on how to direct one's career and analyzed the politics of being in a band. *Cakewalk* also printed ad-hoc archivist Sharon Cheslow's list of women in punk bands between 1975 and 1980. There are hundreds—from the Adverts to White Women.

For some women, having a new generation of woman-centered music, with their own sound and culture, is critical. Amy Ray started her own label, Daemon records, in 1989 soon after the Indigo Girls were signed to Epic, and uses her major label career to bankroll the independent community to which she is much more committed. Daemon is a co-op, which means that the artists are obligated to give 15 hours of work for each record they do. By 1992, Ray, who had resisted what she experienced as possessive and separatist women's music scene, recognized many of her values being confirmed by riot grrrl—from finding a co-op printing company to print your catalog up or using a credit union instead of a bank. "I suddenly felt camaraderie, like 'oh there's people out there who want to do these same things'," says Ray. "And riot grrrl influenced me in terms of hiring women employees—with Daemon and Indigo Girls, too. Instead of saying 'Oh, here's a guitar tech, and it's a man' we find some women who can do guitar tech and train them."

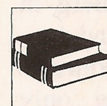
Whether or not women's music moves you, their revolution has had a profound and unacknowledged impact on women in the mainstream. They created a robust production network of music festivals and club shows, alternative distribution (a tricky and unglamorous part of the biz which no younger women have attempted to take on), and made concert-going something that was geared to a female audience specifically. Artists who happen to be gay or bisexual or didn't look or sound a certain boiler-plate way—Ani, Melissa Etheridge, and Tracy Chapman—all had a place from which to enter and an audience of loyal fans from which to draw. The audiences at Lilith are 75 percent female, Lilith grossed 35 million dollars in just two tours, and women bought millions of CDs last year. "It's a woman's market," says Olivia's Dlugazc, "and that took a lot of work."

Many of the women who have labels know next to nothing about Olivia or Ladyslipper but want the same things: creative control and not playing by someone else's rules. Bettina Richards's ethos for her Chicago label Thrill Jockey is complete freedom for the artists and a 50/50 profit split. Jane Siberry started Sheeba, her Toronto label, after eight years on Warner Brothers. "The respect factor was the biggest reason for leaving," says Siberry. "As soon as [Warner] said I had to work with an outside producer, I knew that they had no idea what I was trying to do." But independence isn't easy: Siberry runs the enterprise by herself, from shipping to phone duty to bookkeeping. Richards, Tinuviel, and Wilson all have other jobs to pay the bills.

I'm a 29-year-old feminist and I want to know about the women's music movement because I don't think it's embarrassing or cheesy. I am proud and I know that the women who are making it today owe something to all who came before them: Motown girl groups, Bessie Smith, Joni Mitchell, Chrissie Hynde. It's all part of the same history, but the women's music movement is kept under wraps, we are encouraged to not align ourselves with them, and the divorce from history makes me shudder. I hate it because it's ahistorical and younger women need to have all of the information, all of the examples of changing the system, all of the victories and all of the mistakes in our memory banks, too, if we want to stop reinventing the wheel.

The disparaged blue stockings eventually got their due when radical foremothers like Shulamith Firestone and Ellen Willis began uncovering the lost history of their bold actions. Paying homage to the 19th century feminists, they named their core group the Redstockings: "red" for revolution, "stockings" for the old suffragettes. Riot grrrl and the greater young punk women's community we associate with it often acknowledge their debt. Bikini Kill recorded with pioneer Joan Jett. Ani DiFranco refused to sign an exclusive distribution deal with Koch, insisting that she be able to sell directly to Ladyslipper and Goldenrod, the two largest women-controlled distributors, because they had supported her career since the beginning. Many women are carrying on the philosophy of self-determining women playing music together. The Indigo Girls toured last summer with Lilith (which, ironically, has more men on-stage than women) but also organized an alternative all-woman tour called Suffragette Sessions, which drew from diverse genres. The Indigo Girls have toured with women's music star Ferron. Meanwhile, Kaia, who works part time at Ladyslipper, has covered the Cris Williamson song, "Shooting Star," on her last Butchies record.

The women at Lilith knew very little about the women's music movement, made clear by the fact that MacLachlan claimed that until Lilith "the summer festivals out there were completely male dominated." This disconnect from history is dangerous. For all of the attention "women in rock" got in 1997 and 1998, by the summer of 1999, immature or misogynist acts such as Limp Bizkit or Eminem were dominating the covers of *Rolling Stone* and *Spin*. It was known and accepted in the industry that commercial/alternative radio was not playing any women. Without the benefit of the history of women fighting back in the music industry, the gains of these divas were again receding under the tide of backlash. If Lilith was understood as part of a revolt that began with Mary Lou Williams and gained momentum through the women's music movement, riot grrrl, and Ani Di- Franco, the twin forces of a feminist movement and music would be crashing forward—not drowning. Z



Literature

Gay Literature and the Pulitzer Prize

By Michael Bronski

Early on the afternoon of April 12, a joyful buzz spread through the queer literary community: Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* had just been awarded the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for fiction. Earlier that month it had been a runner-up for the National Books Critics Circle Prize Award, and it