

# Women Composers

There are two pieces of music in this concert composed by women. The role of women composers is hugely significant to the history of music; ensuring that these perspectives are heard is important and benefits us all.

We wanted to highlight these perspectives, just in case you did not study all the works of the concert and as such might have missed out on this exciting chance to look at the changing nature of music history.

Listening to the pieces by Gabriela Ortiz and Laura Shigihara pieces is a good time to discuss the role of women in classical music, and why there might appear to be so few pieces written by women composers in the popular canon of music. Significant amounts of work have been happening in recent years to address this and ensure space on concert programmes for women. Importantly it is not that the music does not exist – it does – but rather that the view of society on the role of women was such that writing music professionally was not an option for many women, and even when they did compose, women’s music wasn’t performed or programmed as often as music by men. Below are some resources that might be useful in having this valuable discussion with your students.

## A short introduction to Women Composers

The video here from the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment looks at some of the issues experienced by women in music, as well as highlighting some of the pioneering women who, despite the challenges, wrote fantastic music.

[Watch here ►](#)

## Challenging gender roles

An interesting task to try with your class is to ask your students to draw people doing different jobs; you could ask them to draw a firefighter, a surgeon, a fighter pilot, and then ask them to give their character a name. Have they drawn a man doing the role? The video below, which uses this idea, then has students meeting the people doing these roles, all of whom are women. It is a powerful moment – if you can run something similar in your school it will be an important and transformational moment for your students and their learning.

[Watch here ►](#)

## BBC Ten Pieces 2024

If you are interested in your pupils knowing more about music written by female composers, the *BBC Ten Pieces 2024* looked at ten female composers throughout history, with lots of excellent resources to support learning. The video game music for *Minecraft* and *Plant vs. Zombies* was composed by Laura Shigihara and features in this resource – It’s likely some of your students already play these games online.

[Check it out here ►](#)

## Short 5-minute task: discussion

**Question:** ‘Why do you think there have been fewer famous women composers than men throughout history?’

**Guided prompts for the teacher to aid the discussion:**

- Has education always been open to boys and girls?
- Have women always had the ability to choose a career?
- Can you name any composers who are women?

Students might think that women have only recently started composing music – but that is not the case! There are some great examples from the *BBC Ten Pieces 2024* which look at the role women have played in music over the course of centuries.

The main take away is that women have not had the same opportunities as men to learn music or to share their work as a career; however, this did not stop women from composing some amazing music.

## Medium 20-minute task: Listen and Draw

Play extracts (1-2 minutes) from some or each of the pieces below:

- **Gabriela Ortiz** – *Altar de Neón* ▶
- **Laura Shigihara** – ‘Everything’s Alright’ from *To the Moon* ▶
- **Miriam Makeba** – *Pata Pata* ▶
- **Lena Raine** – ‘Resurrections’ from *Celeste* ▶
- **Tania León** – *Stride* ▶

As students are listening to the tracks, ask them to draw what they imagine – this might be a scene, feeling, a colour. Ask them:

- What do you see in your mind when you hear the music?
- What colours match the music?
- Where does the music feel like it comes from (e.g. continent, country)?
- Is it calm or busy?

Ask students to share their ideas with the class and describe their creative process with the other students.

# Longer 45-minute task: composition

The objective of this task is for pupils to work in small groups to create their own composition inspired by a female composer.

## 1. Warm Up (5 minutes)

- a. Use a vocal warm up of your choice using the vocal warm up resources

## 2. Group Task (30 minutes)

- a. Split the class into small groups. Ask each group to:
  - i. Choose a mood for their composition
  - ii. Choose 3-4 instruments or sound sources (e.g. singing, body percussion and any classroom instruments you might have available)
  - iii. Compose a 30-second piece inspired by the composers you listened to for the short task
  - iv. Encourage students to create a graphic score of their composition using lines, shapes and icons to represent the contrasting sounds

## 3. Performance (10 minutes)

- a. Ask each group to perform their ideas to the rest of the class
- b. Ask the audience to consider WWW – What Went Well and EBI – Even Better If to appraise the performance

