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Written by *She Shreds Staff*

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This year we furthered our research to name 100 black women guitarists because we believe in constantly celebrating Black and Afro-identifying communities around the world—a statement meant to prove the disparity between the history we’re told and the history that exists.

Last February, we published “50 Historic Black Women Guitarists and Bassists You Needs to Know” to showcase the influences that black, indigenous, and Afro-identifying women musicians have had on music history. For 2020, we updated the list to 100 black women guitarists, because we should constantly be celebrating the innovation, resilience, and talent of black music communities.

For this particular list, we choose to focus on black women guitarists and bassists from prior to 1999. We did this specifically to showcase the legends—many of whom unfortunately have been overlooked, dismissed, or forgotten—that should be recognized as pillars of music history.

This list is not to be brushed off as just another list. Rather, it should be treated as a step taken towards exposing the truth. It’s for all of us who aren’t able to count the names of black women guitarists on one hand. It’s for the young black girls aspiring to be musicians but seldom see a history that represents them. It’s to learn about our past and evolve into our future— and without black history, we cannot accurately do so.

Below are 100 women, some of which you’ve heard about countless times, such as Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Elizabeth Cotten, and Barbara Lynn. Others were found in liner notes, vintage photos without names, and obscure websites deep within the world wide web. With your help, we hope that this list can continue to grow. If you have names, videos, or pictures, please leave them in the comments below. And if you feel so inclined, please share

this article and help distribute the names and lives of these incredible women!

1. Sister Rosetta Tharpe



Sister Rosetta Tharpe (1915 – 1973) is often referred to as the “original soul sister” and “the mother of rock and roll” for too many good reasons to display at once. Among others, Tharpe was among the very first recording guitarists to incorporate heavy distortion on her tracks. Not only did Tharpe influence many more recognizable names such as Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, Johnny Cash, Bob Dylan and Eric Clapton, but her unique style and ability to merge genres gave her an instrumental role in pushing music forward. In 1945, Tharpe’s single, “Strange Things Happening Every Day,” was the first gospel song to cross into popular music, reaching #2 on the Billboard charts.

2. Memphis Minnie



Even before Sister Rosetta Tharpe, it was guitarist/bassist/vocalist Memphis Minnie (1897 – 1973), born Lizzie Douglas, who picked up the torch to keep African American popular music raw and relevant between the 1920s and 1950s. Although more recognized for her impeccable voice, Memphis Minnie’s music helped shape the sound of modern pop music. Below are her best known tracks influenced by her original songs:

Memphis Minnie: 1929 “When the Levee Breaks,”
Made famous by: Led Zeppelin as the final song on Led Zeppelin IV

Memphis Minnie: 1930 “Bumble Bee,” Made famous by:
Muddy Waters’ “Honey Bee.”

Memphis Minnie: “What’s the Matter with the Mill?”
Made famous by: Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys

3. Beverly “Guitar” Watkins



In 2016, She Shreds had the honor of [speaking with blues guitar picking queen](#), Beverly “Guitar” Watkins (1939 – 2019), who began her career as guitarist for Piano Red in 1959. Despite a long and self-described extremely difficult musical path, Watkins desired nothing more than to continue playing, writing, and performing.

She Shreds: Who introduced you to the blues?

Beverly Watkins: Well, it was born in me, from my ancestors. I had a granddaddy who was a banjo player. And then I had four aunties, called the Hayes Sisters—Aunt B., Aunt Ruth, Aunt Nell, and Aunt Margaret. They had a group back in them days and they would go to different churches down in Commerce and they would dress alike. Aunt B. played guitar, Aunt Ruth and Aunt Nell sang, and Aunt Margaret played piano. And my daddy, Lonnie Watkins, played the harmonica.

4. Peggy Jones



Peggy Jones (1940 – 2015), later known as Lady Bo, was an innovative and expressive guitarist. She was an original part of Bo Diddley's sound from 1957 to 1962, and influential in her own songwriting and musical endeavors thereafter. Jones always displayed an enthusiastic willingness to experiment with guitars, effects, and sounds. Her enthusiasm for new guitar technologies helped balance out Diddley's reliance on the cigar box guitar that made him famous, and allowed the band to evolve sonically over the course of time. Though she typically favored Gibson guitars, Lady Bo also played more experimental instruments such as the Roland guitar synthesizer and used their unique sounds in ways not often heard in rhythm and blues guitar.

5. Jessie Mae Hemphill



Jessie Mae Hemphill (1923 – 2016) was truly a great example of the “one woman band,” often performing live with a guitar and tambourine at once. Although guitar was Hemphill’s instrument of choice since age 7, she was also a skilled drummer and percussionist. Hemphill, whose mother, father, and three sisters were all musicians, would go on to be internationally recognized for her unique talent and technique.

6. Carline Ray



Carline Ray. Photo by Raymond Ross.

Born in Manhattan, Carline Ray (1925 – 2013) was an award-winning guitarist/bassist/pianist/singer who studied at Juilliard and earned her Master's in composition. In 1946, Ray joined The International Sweethearts of Rhythm, the “all girl jazz band” known best for being the first and arguably most important all-women contribution to the big band era. Her seven decade career spanned a variety of genres, often switching from various instruments. According to her daughter, Catherine Russell, Ray “always made a point of saying she wasn't a female musician, she was a musician who happened to be female.” We couldn't stand by her statement more.

7. Odetta



Odetta Holmes aka “Odetta” (1930 – 2008) is often referred to as “The Voice of the Civil Rights Movement” for her immense capability to reflect the passion and emotion of her community through works of jazz, folk, blues and beyond. As a result, she influenced some of the greatest names of the folk revival movement: Bob Dylan, Joan Baez and Janis Joplin all sight Odetta as a major influence on their decision to sing and write they way they did. According to *Time* magazine, Rosa Parks was her #1 fan, and Martin Luther King Jr. called her “the queen of American folk music.” Bob Dylan was quoted saying, “The first thing that turned me on to folk singing was Odetta... I went out and traded my electric guitar and amplifier for an

acoustical guitar.” Baez mentions that “Odetta was a goddess. Her passion moved me. I learned everything she sang.”

8. Artists Unknown

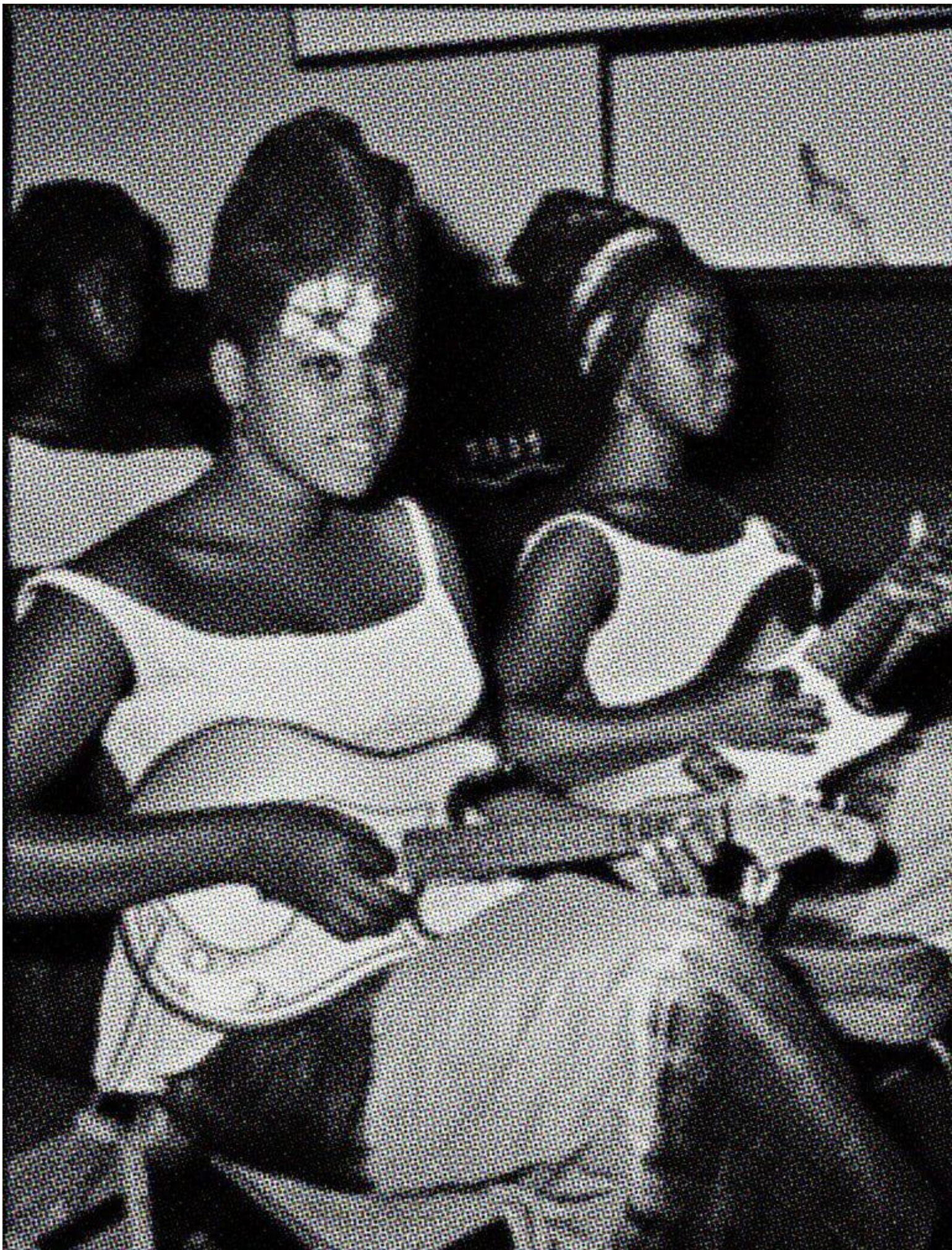


Photo by Roger da Silva sometime between 1953–1969

An image of these unknown women was taken by Roger da Silva for a series of photos taken between 1953–1969 meant to present a historical portrait of Senegal. As far as we know, the names and whereabouts of these women are unknown. The exhibit was featured and presented by XARITUFOTO—a nonprofit in Dakar with a mission to preserve African art as well as The Intensive Art Magazine (IAM)—”one of the first publications that focused exclusively on female African art, fashion, and design.”

9. Sylvia Robinson



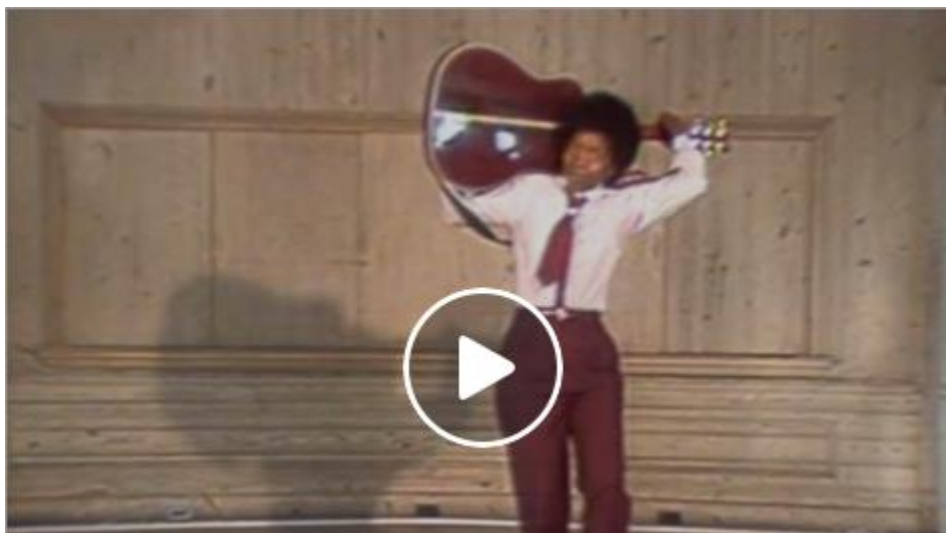
Sylvia Vanderpool aka [Sylvia Robinson](#) is considered “The Mother of Hip-Hop” for being a record producer, record label executive, and founder/CEO of Sugar Hill Records—the label that produced hip hop’s very first top 40 single, “Rappers Delight,” by Sugarhill Gang. However, before becoming the mother of hip hop, Robinson obtained her production, writing, and managing skills as the guitarist and co-writer in Mickey and Sylvia, the duo who sold over 1 million records for their single “Love Is Strange” in 1957. But it doesn’t end there. In 1972, after being rejected by numerous outlets, Robinson recorded her debut solo album on her own, “Pillow Talk,” which became #1 on the R&B chart and crossing over to #3 on Billboard’s Top Hot 100.

10. Etta Baker



Born Etta Lucille Reid, (1913 – 2016), Etta Baker was a playing legend of the Piedmont blues for 90 years. Picking up her first guitar at the age of three, Baker's father Boone Reid taught her how to play a six-string guitar, 12-string guitar, and five-string banjo. Her discography spans from 1956 – 2015, and even while birthing and raising nine kids, Baker was known to never once give up playing the Piedmont Blues.

11. Algia Mae Hinton



Algia Mae Hinton (1929 – 2018) was born in Johnston County, North Carolina and learned to play the guitar at nine years old. She was taught by her mother, who was an expert guitarist and singer, often seen performing at community gatherings. Her father was a dancer and taught her buck dancing and two step. Hinton was best recognized for her ability to merge buck dancing and Piedmont fingerpicking, often playing behind her head (as shown above) as she danced—a true pro. (Video Credit: Dust To Digital)

12. The Duchess



Norma Jean Wofford. Photographer unknown.

Norma Jean Wofford aka The Duchess (1938 – 2005) was the second guitarist in Bo Diddley's band between 1962 and 1966. With her Gretsch Jupiter Thunderbird, she performed back up vocals, danced, and played rhythm guitar alongside Bo Diddley until calling it quits in 1966 to pursue raising a family.

13. Elizabeth Cotten



Elizabeth Cotten (1893 – 1987) is the true definition of innovation. Born in in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, Cotten began teaching herself to play on a banjo at the age of eight. As a teenager and domestic worker, Cotten saved up \$3.75 for a Sears guitar and began teaching herself to play as a left-handed guitarist. What resulted was her very own signature technique: she would take the right-handed guitar and turn it upside down, playing the bass lines with her fingers and the melody with her thumb—a technique known now as “Cotten Picking.” Her most recognized song is “Freight Train.”

14. Linda Martell



While there's not very much information on Linda Martell (born Thelma Bynem, 1941), she was an American Country singer and guitarist. She became the first African American woman to perform at the Grand Ole Opry, but soon thereafter abandoned her career to raise a family.

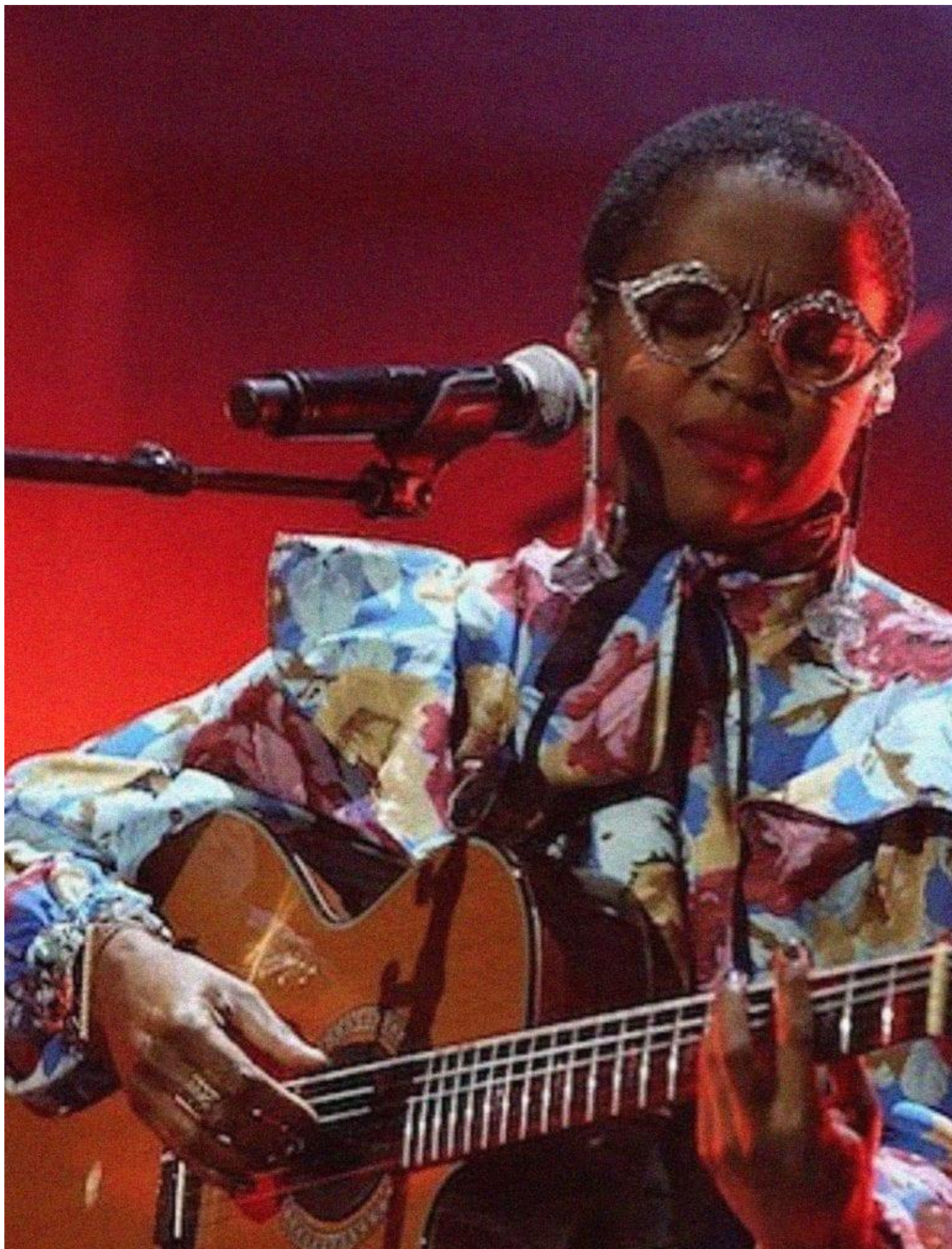
15. Cora Fluker



Little information floats around in the internet about Cora Fluker. Born in Livingston, Alabama around 1920, she grew up sharecropping with her family and was nearly beaten to death after trying to run away at the age of

nine. It seems that shortly thereafter, Flucker's life took a shift into a deep dedication to preaching. As a young girl, she built her own guitar and began writing and singing songs in the church. Flucker performed in churches and at the occasional festival until her death. You can now hear some of her songs on [Spotify](#).

16. Lauryn Hill



Lauryn Hill. Photo by Shareif Ziyadat/FilmMagic.

You might know Lauryn Hill from the Fugees and her award-winning solo album, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*—but do you know what Lauryn Hill does live? She composes, she conducts her band, she sings and raps, *and* she plays an extremely fierce nylon guitar all at the same time.

17. Rosa Lee Hill



“Born 25 September 1910, Como, Mississippi, USA, d. 22 October 1968, Senatobia, Mississippi, USA. The daughter of Sid Hemphill, Rosa Lee Hill grew up in a musical family, playing a broad repertoire for both whites and blacks. Her recordings are confined to blues, which she sang ‘from my mouth, and not from the heart’, feeling them to be incompatible with her religious faith. Her blues are typical of Panola County, where she spent her whole life: accompanied by a droning guitar, her songs have an inward-looking, brooding feel, comparable to those of Mississippi Fred McDowell. Hill and her husband were sharecroppers and lived in dire poverty, particularly towards the end of their lives, when their house burned down and they had to move into a tumbledown shack.” (Caption

Cred: allmusic.com)

18. Joan Armatrading



Joan Armatrading was born in Basseterre, Saint Kitts Britain on December 9th, 1950. Her recording career spans 40 years and she began as a self taught guitarist at the age of 14. At 15, after dropping out of school to support her family, she lost her first job after taking her guitar to work and playing it during tea breaks. She would later become a world-renowned singer songwriter/guitarist nominated for three Grammy Awards, 2 Brit Awards, and receive an Ivor Novello Award for Outstanding Contemporary Song Collection.

19. Barbara Lynn



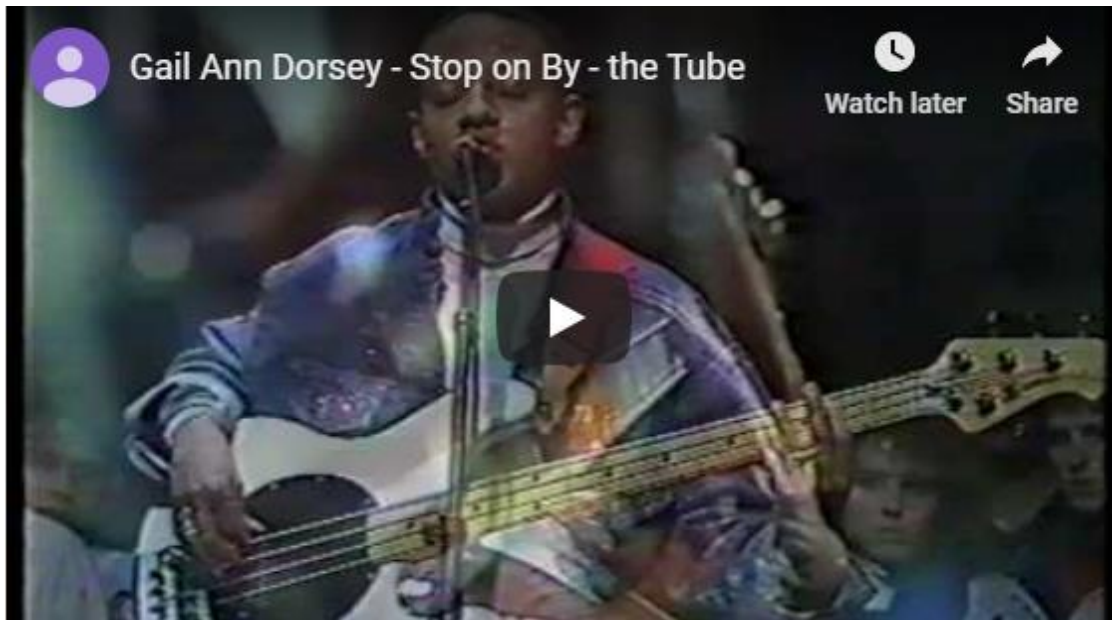
Born Barbara Lynn Ozen in Beaumont, TX on January 16, 1942, Lynn is known as the “Lefty Queen of R&B” for being a lefty guitarist and expert R&B composer. She first began playing the piano as a youngster before switching to guitar. Still a teenager, Lynn began performing at local clubs after winning many high school talent shows, and soon was recognized by singer Joe Barry. Shortly after, Lynn headed to New Orleans to cut her first 12-song LP, comprised of 10 original songs (unusual for an African American woman at the time), including the most well known of them all, “You’ll Lose A Good Thing.” She toured with the likes of Stevie Wonder, Smokey Robinson, Sam Cooke, James Brown, Al Green, Carla Marvin Gaye, the Temptations, and B.B. King, and was covered by the Rolling Stones and Otis Redding. In the 1970s, Lynn retired to take care of her family after not being very satisfied with how she was represented by her label, Atlantic Records. Twenty years later, she began writing and touring, and continues to do so to this day.

20. Band Unknown



Photo by Charles 'Teenie' Harris/Carnegie Museum of Art/Getty Images. Band: unknown. One of the many images that speak to the prominence of black women instrumentalists unsung. PS: That Silvertone guitar though.

21. Gail Ann Dorsey



Gail Anne Dorsey is a longtime musician best known for her work as the bassist for David Bowie between 1995 until his death in 2016, as well as her songwriting, bass, and touring work with Tears for Fears from 1993 to 1996. Dorsey's career is long and packed, but it all started with a guitar at the age of nine. Although she picked up the bass at 14, she didn't consider herself a bassist until the age of 20, which then became her main instrument as a solo and session player. Among many other accomplishments, Dorsey has recorded, performed, and written with the likes of Lenny Kravitz, Bryan Ferry, Boy George, the Indigo Girls, Gwen Stefani, Charlie Watts, Seal, Gang of Four, and many more.

22. Stella Bass



Stella Bass. Photo by Waring Abbott/Getty Images.

Stella Bass was a member of the horn rock band Isis, named after the Egyptian Goddess. (Horn rock was a genre that developed in the late 1960s fusing jazz, improve, funk, rock and blues.) Isis was the fifth all-women band to sign to a major label, and one of the few (if not only) signed to a major label at the time with an openly gay woman. It's tough to find info on Stella herself and the career she led before and after the band, however, Isis was a legendary band for their time—opening for the likes of Kiss, Lynyrd Skynyrd and The Beach Boys.

23. Artist Unknown

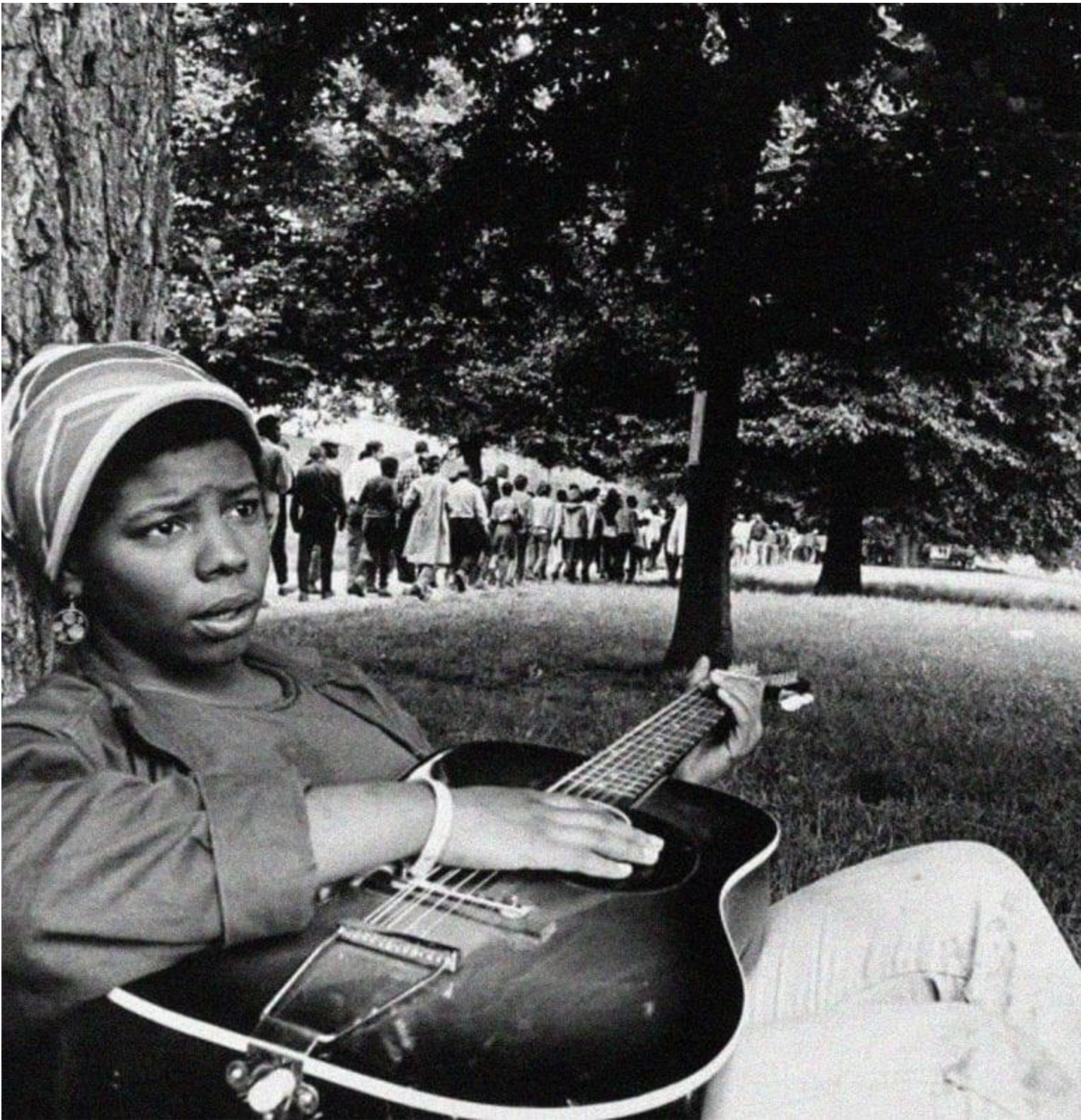


Photo by Morton Broffman.
Artist: unknown. Taken during the Civil Rights Movement .

24. Flora Molton



Born in Louisa County, Virginia (1908 – 1990), Flora Molton was a gospel singing slide guitarist who made a name for herself busking on the corner of 7th Street NW and F Street NW streets in Washington, DC. Due to being born partially blind, she was often unable to find employment and therefore continued busking, performing at local venues and even toured Europe until just a few months before her death at 82 years old. Morton wrote what she called “spiritual and truth music,” and according to a plaque dedicated to her in Louisa County, she picked up the slide guitar by seeing it played with a knife at a community party—a technique she adopted herself later on.

25. Willa Mae Buckner



Willa Mae Buckner. Photographer unknown.

Willa Mae Buckner (1922 – 2000) is truly one of the most fascinating stories we've encountered yet. Born in Augusta, Georgia, Buckner was a fearless woman who taught herself piano at age 21 and picked up the guitar at 35. She was known for many different lives: she knew seven languages, traveled with her own circus/snake show, was a guitar slinging burlesque dancer, and "settled down" by owning 28 snakes at the end of her life. From an interview in *Living Blues Magazine*, April, 1993: "I sang just regular kind of blues that they were singing out there. I used to do risqué, dirty songs. I started playing piano when I was 21, then I switched over to guitar when I was about 35. There was three of us. We used to get together with our instruments. One of us played Hawaiian guitar, the other one played straight." Read a more in depth [bio](#) of Willa Mae Buckner.

26. Precious Bryant



"Precious Bryant was born on January 4, 1942, in Talbot County, the third of nine children, and was a country blues singer and finger style guitarist of the Piedmont Tradition. As a young girl she sang with her sisters in their Baptist church. Her family was musical, and she learned to play guitar at a very early age, becoming proficient by age nine. Her father then taught her to play bottleneck guitar, and eventually her uncle and mentor, blues musician George Henry Bussey, presented her with an instrument of her own, a Silvertone from Sears and Roebuck. Bryant dropped out of high school in

the eleventh grade and in 1965 got married. She soon began performing whenever possible, accepting tips in her guitar. Bryant's repertoire evolved from traditional songs to include original arrangements and compositions.”
(Caption Credit: [Terminus Records](#))

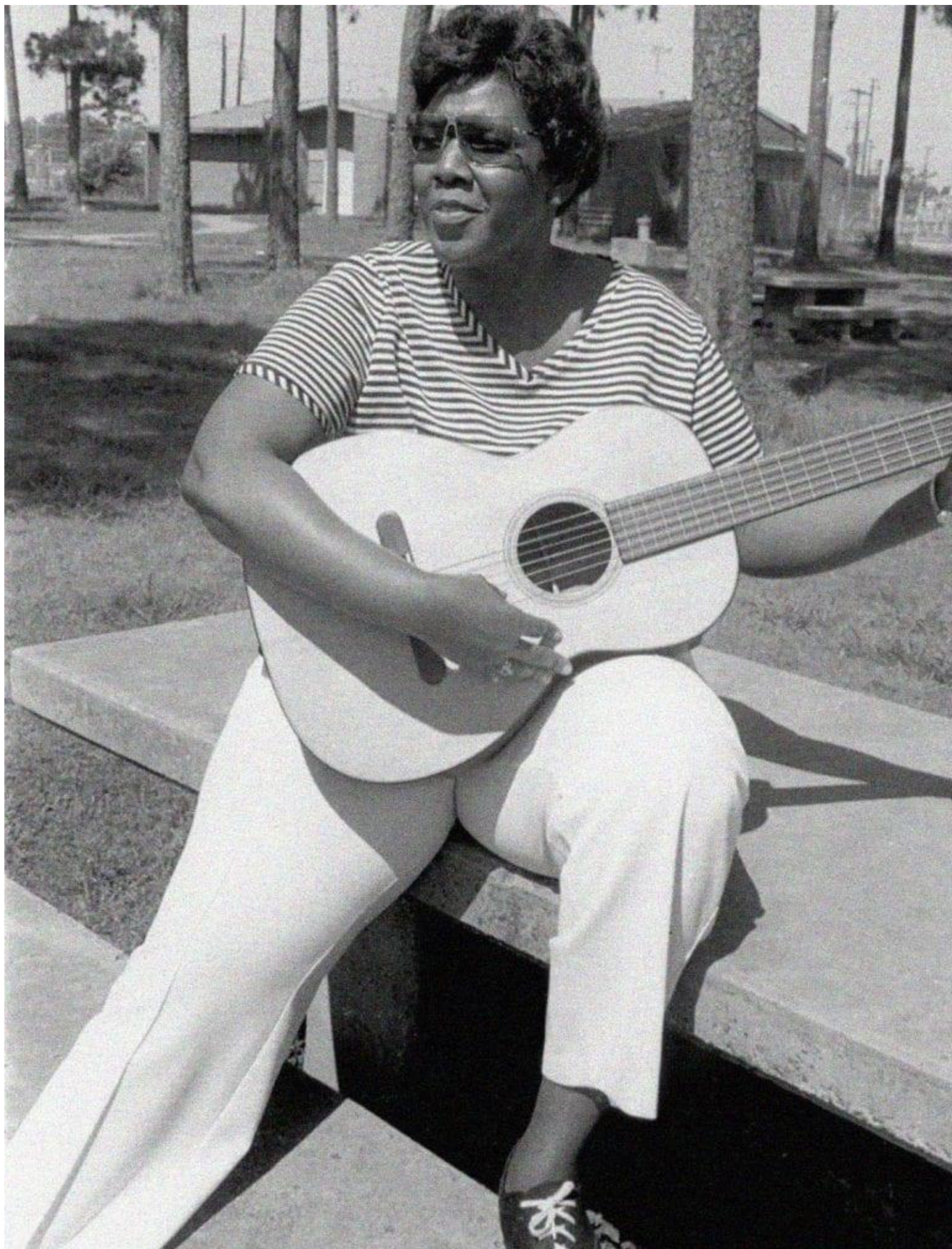
27. Marilyn Scott



Marylin Scott/Mary Deloach. Photographer unknown.

Marylin Scott/Mary Deloach had two stage names: the former for her gospel church recordings, and the latter for her R&B arrangements—the two genres generally steering clear for one another in the 1950s. Although composing under similar genres and gaining similar notoriety as Sister Rosetta Tharpe at the time, little is known about Marylin Scott besides having a recording career between 1943 – 1953, in which she recorded guitars and vocals in blues and gospel style.

28. Barbara Jordan



Barbara Jordan

Born in Houston, Texas Barbara Jordan (1936 – 1996) was an incredible leader of the Civil Rights Movement, a politician, and an educator who enjoyed playing guitar as a hobby. Despite facing segregation laws and attitudes in all facets of her career, Jordan maintained the first in many categories, including being the first black politician elected to the Texas Senate since 1883, and the first black Southern woman elected to the US House of Representatives—the first woman in her own right to represent Texas in the House.

29. Sister O.M Terrell



[Sister O.M. Terrell](#), born Ola Mae Terrell (1911 – 2006), was an Atlanta native who experienced a salvation experience at age 11 while attending a Holiness Movement tent revival. By the Great Depression, she had become a blues-minded street musician who used her talents to evangelize passers-by, singing original compositions such as “God’s Little Birds.”

30. Tracy Chapman



Tracy Chapman is one of the most recognizable voices of contemporary folk pop, with hits so memorable that her lyrics remain in the lexicon of anyone who lived through the late 1980s and 1990s. At a time when hair metal and synth-pop dominated the airwaves, Chapman brought the minimalist traditions of the singer-songwriter to the Bush era, offering an unfiltered and sobering social critique that resonated around the world. Chapman is often credited with having revived the singer-songwriter style in mainstream music all together, paving the way for a long string of folk singers who gained mainstream success throughout the 1990s.

Signed to Elektra Records in 1987, her self-titled debut album in 1988 sold over 20 million records worldwide. A long time anti-apartheid activist, she was invited to perform her hit "Fast Car" at Nelson Mandela's 70th birthday tribute, which raised money for children's' causes and for South Africa's Anti-Apartheid Movement. In addition to multi platinum record sales, Grammy Awards, and her history of social activism, Chapman's mainstream visibility as a queer woman of color in the 1980s and 1990s can not be overlooked as a significant legacy. From all of us to Tracy—THANK YOU!!

31. Bea Booze



Bea Booze (1912 – 1986), often referred to as “Wee Bea Booze,” was an R&B and jazz singer popular in the 1940s for her interpretation of Ma Rainey’s song “See See Rider Blues,” which went to number one in 1943 on the US Billboard R&B Chart. Immersed in the rich musical culture of Harlem, she channeled the influences of singers such as Lil Green while recording for Decca Records. The song “See See Rider Blues” has continued to take on a life of its own, becoming a staple of blues performers such as Ella Fitzgerald, LaVern Baker, and Lead Belly, eventually picked up by many white performers such as Peggy Lee, Elvis, Janis Joplin, Bruce Springsteen, and the Grateful Dead.

32. Meshell Ndegeocello



Both a young legend and an active contemporary artist, Meshell Ndegeocello's debut album, *Plantation Lullabies*, was released in 1993 and is credited with helping ignite the neo-soul movement of the 1990s. A bassist, songwriter, and rapper, her career has featured collaborations and recordings with Chaka Khan, Herbie Hancock, Madonna, John Mellencamp, The Rolling Stones, Basement Jaxx, Alanis Morissette, Zap Mama, and Ibeyi, to name a few. Part of Ndegeocello's legacy is her reverence to other former legends, having recorded a full album in tribute to Nina Simone in 2012, as well as having created a theatrical production in homage to James Baldwin's book, *The Fire Next Time*. The musical, titled, *Can I Get a Witness? The Gospel of James Baldwin*, debuted in 2016 and featured fellow guitarist Toshi Reagon.

33. Felicia Collins



Felicia Collins is best known as the lead guitarist for the house band on *Late Night With David Letterman*, known as the CBS Orchestra. Also a vocalist and percussionist, she has toured and recorded since the 1980s with artists such as Nile Rodgers, Al Jarreau, Cyndi Lauper, Madonna, Vonda Shepard, George Clinton, P-Funk, and the Thompson Twins. In 2018, Collins performed at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction of Sister Rosetta Tharpe, appearing onstage with Brittany Howard, Questlove, and Paul Shaffer. Previously, she had provided guitar for [*Marie and Rosetta*](#), a theatrical production about the lives of Sister Rosetta Tharpe and gospel singer Marie Knight.

34. Debora Coleman



Deborah Coleman (1956 – 2018) was a lead blues guitarist and singer-songwriter born in Virginia. Raised in a musical family, she picked up the guitar at age eight and went on to play in various rock and R&B bands when she was 15. In 1993, Coleman took first place at the Charleston Blues Festival's National Amateur Talent Search. As a result, she was able to record her debut album, *Talkin' A Stand*, which was released in 1994 with New Moon Records in North Carolina.

35. Charity Bailey



Charity Bailey on NBC's "Sing A Song"

Charity Alberta Bailey (1904 – 1978) was a singer, educator, TV host, and pioneer in the field of children's music. She wrote songbooks arranged on guitar and piano, and developed curriculums that used classical music and folk music from around the world to teach music to children. Bailey studied at Julliard and Dalcroze before becoming Director of Music at the Little Red School House in New York City.

36. The Thornton Sisters



The Thornton Sisters appeared on the Ted Mack Amateur Hour twice during the 1950s. Their dad enrolled the sisters into music lessons and soon after, they became regular performers on college campuses, often performing as the the backup instrumental group for R&B concerts. These performances were also a way for the family to save for medical school tuition for their daughters. The Thornton Sisters sound transitioned from jazz to R&B as the times changed.

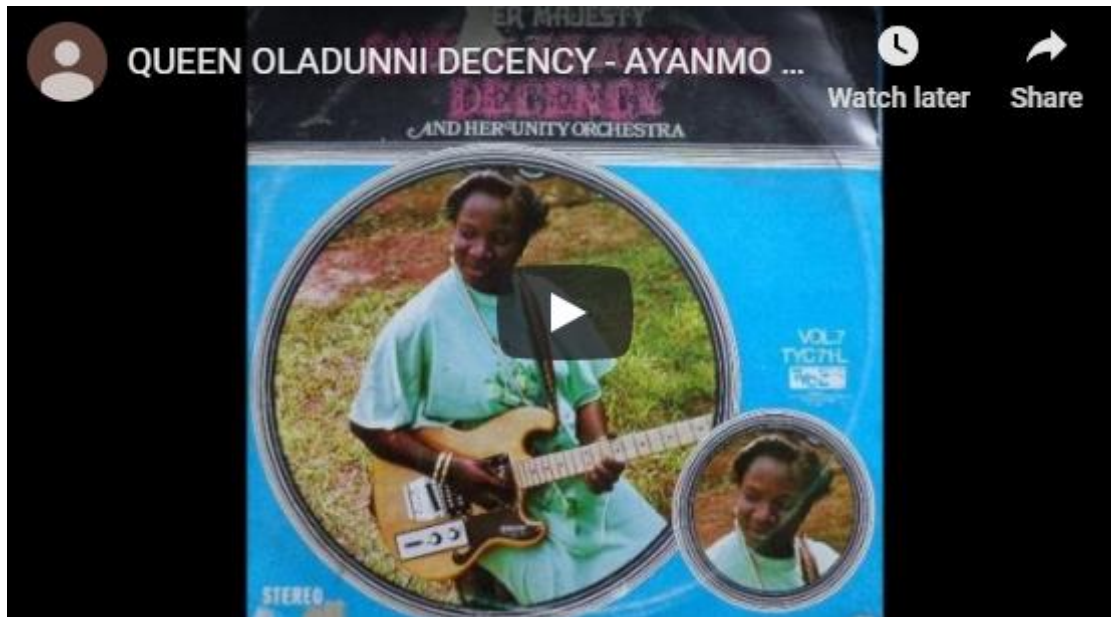
37. Joyce Rooks of The Dinettes



Joyce Rooks (left), in one of her other bands, The Cockpits, circa 1978. Photo by Edie Maitland.

Joyce Rooks played guitar and vocals in rock band The Dinettes from 1979 – 1980. Right before, in 1978, she had been in the band The Cockpits (seen above), which eventually morphed into The Dinettes and had a few member changes.

38. Queen Oladunni Decency



Serifatu Oladunni Oduguwa, also known by her stagenames Queen Oladunni Decency and Mummy Juju, was one of the most popular musicians of the Yoruba jùjú genre (Nigerian popular music from traditional Yoruba percussion). Queen Oladunni Decency fronted the Unity Orchestra as a singer and guitarist.

39. Klymaxx



Formed in 1979 in LA by producer/drummer Bernadette Cooper, Klymaxx was a R&B/Pop band whose members included Cheryl Cooley (guitar), Lynn Malsby (keyboard), Lorena Porter Shelby, and Joyce “Fenderella” Irby (vocals). Their 1984 album, *Meeting In the Ladies Room*, went platinum in the United States.

40. Sarah McLawler & The Syncoettes



Sarah McLawler (1926 – 2017) formed an all-women instrumental group, Sarah McLawler & The Syncoettes, in Chicago in the 1940s right before the rock ‘n’ roll era took off. The Syncoettes were a four piece, with McLawler (piano), Lula Roberts (saxophone), Hetty Roberts (drums), and Vi Wilson

(bass). They became the house band for Chicago's Club Savoy for a short time and released a handful of records during the 1950s.

41. International Sweethearts of Rhythm



The International Sweethearts of Rhythm was one of the first racially integrated all-women swing bands that gained popularity during the WWII era. The group toured extensively throughout the states and abroad with the USO, performing on the Armed Forces radio and playing top venues across the country. The Jim Crow laws, racism, and sexism made traveling dangerous and difficult for the band to be taken seriously as musicians. Carline Ray was a guitarist in the group and can be seen in the above video.

42. Janice-Marie Johnson of A Taste of Honey



Janice-Marie Johnson was a founding member and the bassist/vocalist of the recording act, A Taste of Honey, formed in 1971. Eventually, Hazel Payne came on board as guitarist/vocalist. The group's main genre was disco with a few songs that were chart toppers in both R&B and pop. Johnson picked up the bass while she was in college and played shows with A Taste of Honey all along Southern California and on military bases. The group won a Grammy in 1978 for Best New Artist.

43. Toshi Reagon



Toshi Reagon has been active as a folk, blues, R&B, country, gospel, rock, and funk musician since 1978. As a queer artist and activist, Reagan was raised by musician parents who were social activists during the civil rights movement and part of The Freedom Singers group. She has performed and shared stages with the likes of Lenny Kravitz, Elvis Costello, and Ani DiFranco. Reagon's most recent musical endeavor was *Parable of the Sower: The Opera*, adapted from Octavia E. Butler's post-apocalyptic novel of the same name.

44. PMS



Photo by Suzanne Thomas.

PMS (Pre-Metal Syndrome), was the first all-black female metal band formed in the early 1990s by guitarist Suzanne Thomas. PMS defied what it means to be a black woman performing heavy metal music in a scene that is often dominated by heteronormative, white, cis males. PMS is featured in Laina Dawes 2012 book, [*What Are You Doing Here? A Black Woman's Life and Liberation in Heavy Metal.*](#)

45. Nothembi Mkhwebane



Considered the Queen of Ndebele (a language spoken by 1.6 million people in South Africa) music, and a national icon, Nothembi Mkhwebane is widely considered to have brought the Ndebele language to the world stage. A prolific multi-instrumentalist, Mkhwebane composes on guitar and traditional instruments, and her songs often feature uplifting hand claps, intricate guitar riffs, and music shakers.

Recommended listening: *Zimani Balibalele* (1998)

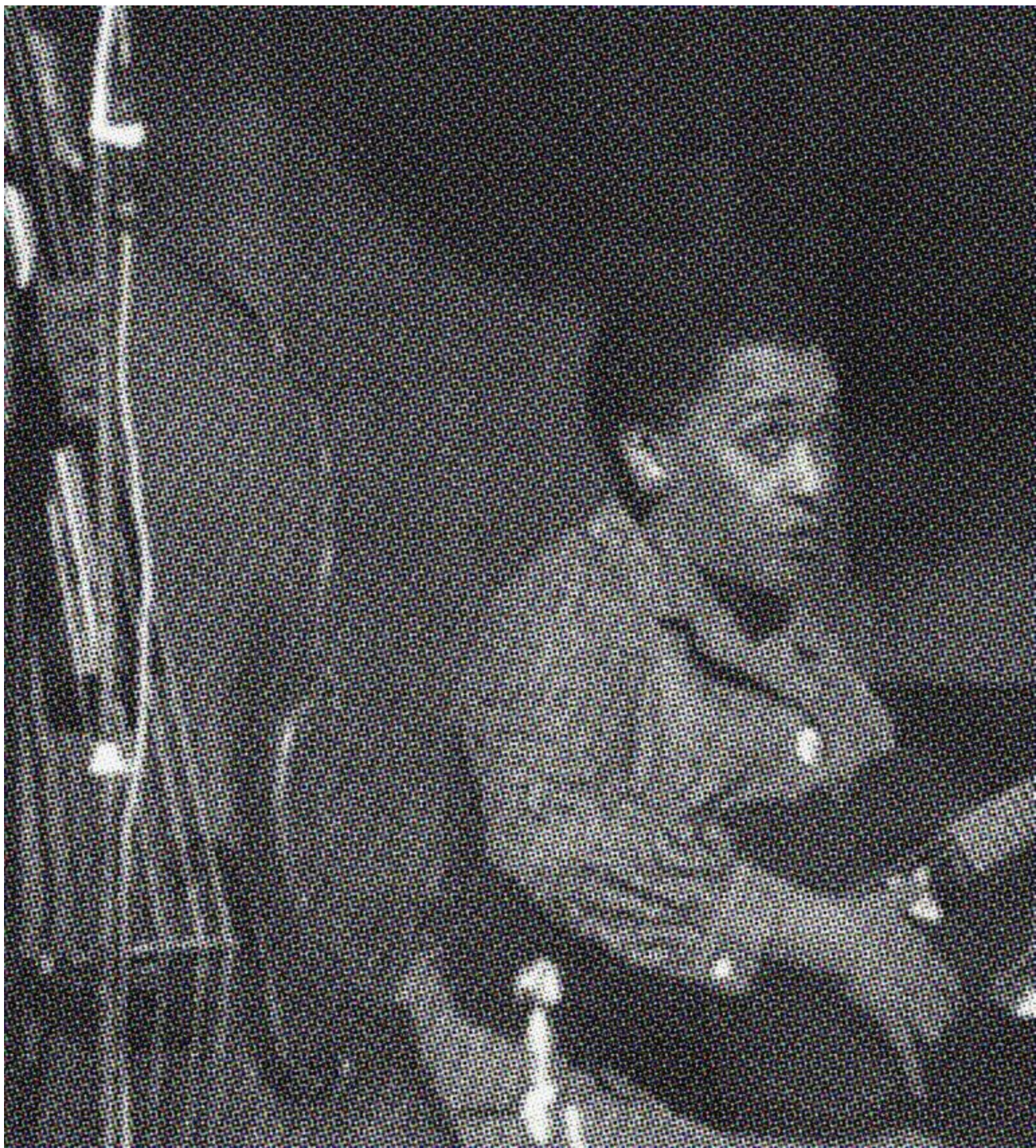
46. Tu Nokwe



Hailing from South Africa, Tu Nokwe taught herself to play the guitar as a young woman. She eventually landed a spot at the Manhattan School of Music and went on to perform around the world. Nokwe's work has detectable funk and pop influences, but her adept guitar playing and soprano voice create a style that is uniquely her own.

Recommended listening: *African Child* (1999)

47. Victoria Spivey



Victoria Spivey. Photographer unknown.

Born in Houston, TX, Victoria Spivey (1906 – 1976) was an American blues singer and songwriter whose career began in the family string band and later got into show business and Vaudeville theater. In 1951, Spivey

decided to retire from show business, but just about a decade later, in 1962, she formed her own record company, Spivey Records, upon which she returned to recording and performing music.

48. Queen Sylvia Embry



Queen Sylvia Embry (1941 – 1992) was born in Arkansas. As a kid, she was trained on piano by her grandmother. By the time she was 19, Embry moved to Memphis, followed by Chicago, to pursue music. In Chicago, she fell in love with the bass and started working with Lefty Dizz. She soon became known as one of Chicago's leading blues bassists. By 1983, Queen Sylvia went out on her own and released her debut solo record, *Midnight* (Evidence).

49. Melba Jewell of Fabulous PJs



L-R: Melba and Patricia Jewell, Patti-Jo Patriquin. 1965. Photo from Guelph

Museums.

Melba Jewell (1934 – date unknown) and her sibling Pat formed the Fabulous PJs and released one album together while residing in Guelph, Ontario. The Jewell's were one of many families local to the area that used their musical talents to combat racism and to empower the black youth of the time.

50. Las Chicas Del Can



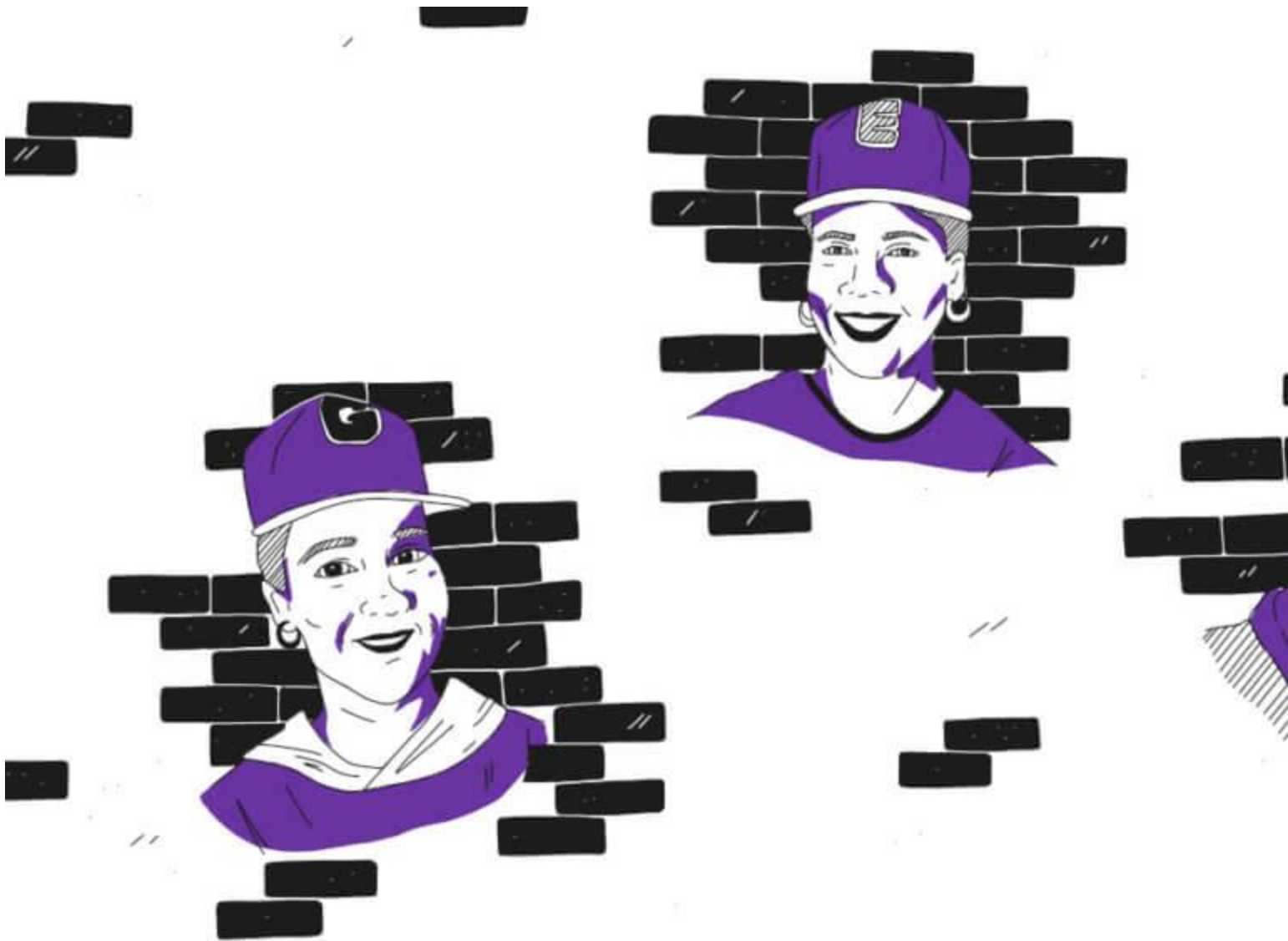
Las Chicas Del Can was the first all-women merengue group from the Dominican Republic with a rotating cast of Dominican and Afro-Dominican singers and musicians throughout their career. Founded in 1981, they performed a number of hits throughout the 1980s, and a great number of their singles and albums achieved gold and/or platinum status. Las Chicas Del Can toured around the world and Europe, including Venezuela, Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, Puerto Rico, the United States, Holland, and more.

51. Tracy Wormworth



Tracy Wormworth began her career as the bassist for the new wave band, the Waitresses, until their breakup in 1984. She went on to record and tour with the B52s, starting around 1990, and officially became a band member in 2017. Wormworth was once part of the house band on *The Rosie O'Donnell Show*, and she's toured with Cyndi Lauper, Sting, Joan Osborne, and more.

52. ESG



Credit: Chloe McAllister

Hailing from the South Bronx, ESG was formed by the Scroggins sisters in 1978. The iconic no-wave funk band wrote the most sampled song of all time, “UFO,” which has been referenced by everyone from Grime Mob, to Wu Tang Clan, to indie rockers Liars. Deborah and Renee Scroggins both played bass in different iterations of the band—starting out on vocals, Renee took over bass duties when Deborah left the band in 1987. Renee still performs as ESG, with her daughter Nicole and son Nicholas. Read our feature with Renee Scroggins, [“40 Years of Dancing: In Conversation with Renee Scroggins of ESG.”](#)

53. Rhonda Smith



“Here name is Rhonda and she is funky.” – Prince

Canadian bassist Rhonda Smith worked with Prince for almost a decade, having been introduced to him by world famous drummer Sheila E, whom Smith met while at a music convention in Germany. She’s also performed with Chaka Khan, Beyonce, Erykah Badu, Patti Labelle, Little Richard, George Clinton, and many more. In 2000, Smith released, *Intellipop*, marking her first album as a soloist, followed by *RS2* in 2006.

52. Debra Killings



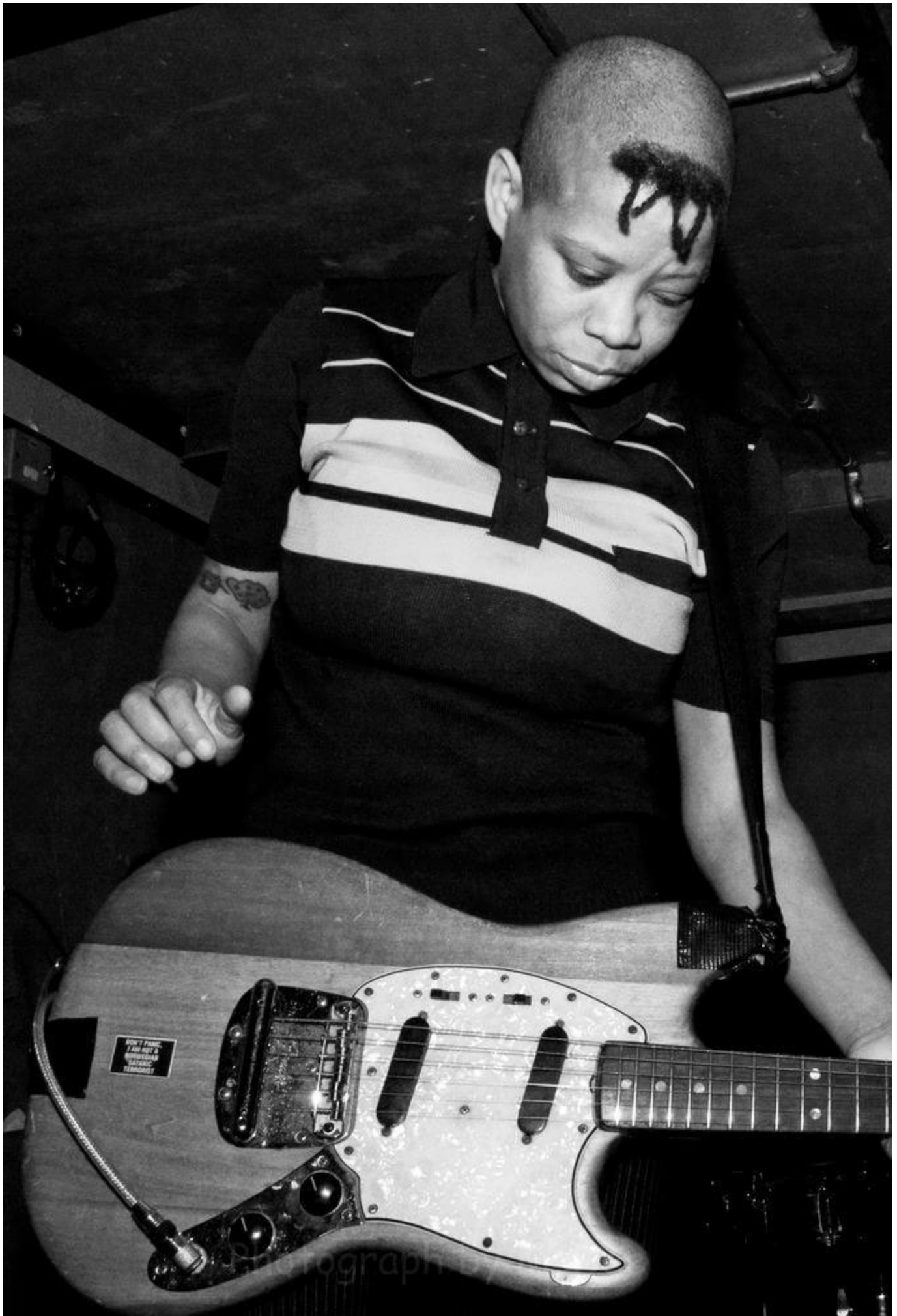
Debra Killings has offered her vocals and bass playing to some of the most iconic artists of the 1990s, including TLC, Monica, and OutKast. In 2003, the Atlanta-born bassist released her debut solo album, a gospel LP entitled *Surrender*. She has also played bass for BET's "Black Girls Rock" all-star band.

53. Leslie Langston



Originally from Newport, RI, Leslie Langston played bass in two of Tanya Donnelly's 1990s alternative rock bands, Throwing Muses and Belly. Langston's driving bass and incredible tone was an asset in enhancing the shifting tempos of Donnelly's writing, adding an additional layer of spasmodic catchiness.

54. Debbie Smith



British guitarist and bass player Debbie Smith was in a variety of British rock bands in the 1990s, including Echobelly, Nightnurse, Snowpony, Bows, Ye Nuns, and SPC ECO. Today, she performs as a DJ and plays guitar with the bands Blindness and The London Dirthole Company.

55. Starr Cullars



Raised and trained in Philadelphia and New York, bassist Starr Cullars was the only woman musician in George Clinton & Parliament-Funkadelic. She was introduced to George Clinton by Prince, whom she had auditioned for, and toured with P-Funk for many years. She was also featured as a TV celebrity on VH1's "Rock N Roll Fantasy Camp 2" and was called the "Queen of Rock" by Paul Stanley (of Kiss) and Mark Hudson (producer). Today, Cullars performs with her own groups, including the hard rock band The SCC.

56. Monnette Sudler



Jazz guitarist Monnette Sudler started playing when she was just 15 years old. Born in 1952 and raised in Philadelphia, she started taking lessons at the Wharton Center, and eventually went on to study at Berklee School of Music in the 1970s and at Temple University in the 1980s. Early in her career, she performed with Sounds of Liberation, a group who used their music to help spark social activism, with a tremendous impact on the African American and jazz community in Philadelphia. From 1977 through 2009, Sudler recorded eight jazz albums and has performed with a variety of musicians.

57. Laura Love



Known for her folk and Afro-Celtic songs, guitarist Laura Love did not find the path to a musical career easy. Born in Lincoln, Nebraska, her mother's mental health took a devastating toll on her childhood, and her jazz musician father, Preston Love, was not present for much of her youth. Love began performing at 16 years, singing for prisoners at the Nebraska State Penitentiary. She eventually relocated to Seattle, WA, where she was a member of the 1980s rock groups Boom Boom G.I. and Venus Envy. She has released 12 albums since 1990, and in 2004 she published her memoir, *You Ain't Got No Easter Clothes*, with an accompanying album of the same name.

58. India.Arie



R&B singer-songwriter India.Arie has won four Grammy Awards out of 23 nominations to date, including Best R&B Album in 2003 for *Voyage to India*. Since 2001, she's released seven studio albums, and has written soulful, political-driven songs such as 2006's "I Am Not My Hair" and 2016's "Breathe," which was inspired by Black Lives Matter and Eric Garner's last words.

59. Valerie Turner



Blues guitarist and vocalist Valerie Turner is an incredible player and resource of Piedmont blues, a style characterized by fingerpicking with an alternating thumb bass string rhythmic pattern that supports a syncopated melody while the treble strings are generally picked with the fore-finger. Musicians such as Elizabeth Cotten, Memphis Minnie, and Etta Baker are

known for playing in this style, and Turner and her husband often play as a duo called Piedmont Blūz. She has released two albums, authored and edited the book, *Piedmont Style Country Blues Guitar Basics*, and was inducted into the New York Blues Hall of Fame (along with her husband and their duo, each separately) in 2018.

60. Kim Clarke



New Yorker and jazz bassist Kim Clarke is most notably known for touring with the late Joe Henderson Quartet throughout Europe in 1986. She toured with numerous groups across the world over the years, playing both acoustic and electric bass. Clarke has also worked as an educator, bringing the history of dance and jazz to numerous schools in the New York area, as well as collaborating on a jazz study program (with pianist Bertha Hope through the Jazz Foundation of America) geared to mentor Bronx high school girls.

Fun fact: In 1963, Clarke's mother brought her to the March on Washington, where she watched Martin Luther King deliver his "I Have A Dream" speech.

61. Geeshie Wiley



Few details about the life of Geeshie Wiley (1908-1950) can be confirmed, but the country blues singer and guitarist has left a legacy regardless. Writer John Jeremiah Sullivan published a [New York Times feature](#) about Wiley and her recording partner, Evlie Thomas, collecting facts about the two women from musicologist and folklorist, Mack McCormick. Wiley recorded six known songs during her life, all released on Paramount Records during 1930-1931, and the song “Last Kind Words” has been covered by numerous artists.

62. Elvie “L.V.” Thomas



As mentioned above, Elvie “L.V.” Thomas (1891-1979) is often noted as Geeshie Wiley’s recording partner, but the Texas blues guitarist also wrote some of those initial songs. In 1930, she recorded two songs issued by

Paramount Records, “Motherless Child Blues” and “Over to My House,” on which Wiley played second guitar. The two recorded the duet “Pick Poor Robin Clean” for Paramount in 1931, and Thomas also backed Wiley on guitar for three other tracks from these sessions, including “Last Kind Words Blues,” “Skinny Leg Blues,” and “Eagles on a Half.” In her later years, Thomas sang in Mount Pleasant Baptist Church choir in a suburb outside of Houston.

63. Sippie Wallace

SIPPIE WALLA

Complete Recordings
In Chronologic

documentary
RECORDS
DOCD-5



VOLUME
1923-19

FEATURING LOUIS ARMSTRONG
CLARENCE WILLIAMS
MORRIS · SIDNEY HOPKINS
KING OLIVER ·
THOMAS A. MORRIS

Sippie Wallace grew up in a music family, and she followed her brothers around, moving from Houston, to New Orleans, to Chicago, where she eventually signed a contract with Okeh Records in 1923. For about 40 years, Wallace quit recording and performed as a singer and organist with the Leland Baptist Church in Detroit, until she was coaxed to make a comeback in 1966, resulting in the recording of two albums, *Women Be Wise* and *Sing the Blues*. These recordings inspired Bonnie Raitt to take up singing and playing the blues in the late 1960s, and even recorded covers of Wallace's "Women Be Wise" and "Mighty Tight Woman" on her self-titled debut album in 1971. The two women toured and recorded together in the 1970s and 1980s, and Wallace continued to record on her own as well. She was nominated for a Grammy Award in 1982 and was inducted into the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame in 1993.

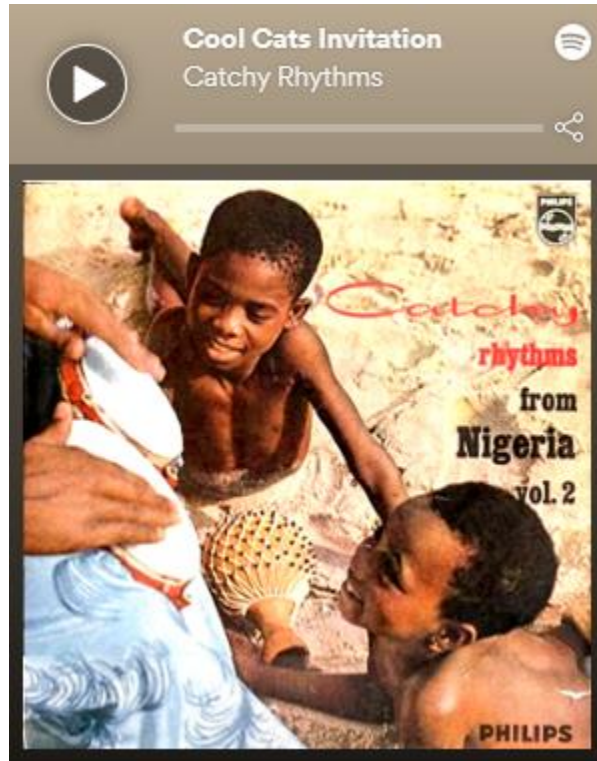
64. Ella Jenkins



Born in 1924, educator and children's musician Ella Jenkins has been dubbed as the "The First Lady of the Children's Folk Song." She got her start in the 1950s while working as a YMCA program director for teens, performing international folk and traditional songs that she learned through her neighborhood in Chicago, as well as songs she had written. For the last 50 years, Jenkins has toured her songs for school assemblies across the United States with a focus on passing on cultural knowledge, released over 60 albums for children (including 1995's *Multicultural Children's Songs*, the most popular Smithsonian Folkways release), appeared on numerous

children's television programs, and received a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 2004.

65. Victoria Iruemi



Nigerian guitarist Victoria Iruemi was a highlife pioneer. She left her training as a seamstress to pursue mastering the guitar in the 1950s, and eventually joined one of the most popular bands in Lagos, the Cool Cats, started by Victor Olaiya in 1954. During one of their shows, Iruemi was noticed by the proprietor of the Lagos Roadhouse Hotel, who invited her to front the nine-piece Roadhouse Dance Band, making her Nigeria's first woman bandleader. Despite having faced harsh criticism as a woman and disappearing from music in the 1960s, Iruemi inspired other Nigerian women to pick up instruments and form all-women bands.

67. Gloria Bell



Myrtle Young and Her Rays L to R: Gloria Bell, Hettie Smith, Regina Albright, Willene Barton, Myrtle Young. Credit: Charles "Teenie" Harris
Gloria Bell was the bassist of Myrtle Young and her Rays of Rhythm, an all-women band started and led by Myrtle Young on saxophone, Hetty Smith on drums, Regina Albright on piano, and Willene Barton on tenor

saxophone. The band originated in the early 1950s, and was the precursor to the International Sweethearts of Rhythm, the first integrated all-women's band in the United States.

68. Lucille Dixon



LUCILLE DIXON

(Show, Dance & Recording)

Records: "Embraceable You
(Washington)"; "Black Magic"
(Grimes) . . . Club 845, N. Y.

Club Savannah, N. Y. (1½
Radio: WOR . . . Apollo T

Radio: WOR . . . Apollo T

Contact: *WHO'S WHO II*

Born in Harlem, Lucille Dixon (1923 – 2004) was a jazz double bassist who started her studies in high school, performing with the All City High School Orchestra and the National Youth Administration Orchestra. She studied at Brooklyn College, as well as with Frederick Zimmerman of the New York Philharmonic, and went on to perform in the International Sweethearts of Rhythm and the Earl Hines jazz band. In 1946, she started the Lucille Dixon Orchestra, which performed until 1960. In 1964, Dixon joined a group of other black musicians to form the Symphony of the New World, the first racially integrated orchestra in the United States.

69. Marion Hayden



Credit: DARYL SMITH

In 1964, Detroit jazz bassist Marion Hayden began playing when she was just 12 years old. She has been involved in countless ensembles throughout her career, including Straight Ahead and the all-female group Venus, performing and recording with jazz legends, and releasing her own work, including her solo album *Visions*. She is currently on the faculty in Michigan's Department of Jazz and Contemporary Improvisational Studies.

70. Shanta Nurullah

It's not passion
and never sleep
It's doing more to make another
man of the machine
man of the machine
It will be until
man comes to rest...
CONSCIENCE



Shanta Nurullah brings together the sitar, the Indian classical instrument, with jazz. She founded Sitarsys, a Spiritual Jazz ensemble, in addition to co-founding Sojourner and Samana, playing with Nicole Mitchell, Dee Alexander, and the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM). She also plays bass, piano, and many other instruments, as well as being an award-winning storyteller. Last year, [She Shreds chatted with Nurullah](#) on what drew her to the sitar and the connection she's grown with the instrument.

71. Edna M. Smith



While Edna M. Smith (1924 – date unknown) was a phenomenal bassist, performing primarily in the 1940s and 1950s with the International Sweethearts of Rhythm, the Vi Burnside Orchestra, and the Edna Smith Trio, her major contribution to music was that of an educator. During the 1950s and 1960s, Smith studied at the Manhattan School of Music and Teachers College at Columbia University in New York City. She went on to teach in the public school system, and from 1961 – 1967 she lived in Africa and worked as a lecturer at the University of Nigeria. She contributed to numerous articles, journals, and TV and radio programs on the subject of African and Afro-American Music.

72. Violet “Vi” Wilson



Vi Wilson on the double bass. Photo by Paul Ressler.

Born and raised in Los Angeles, Violet “Vi” Wilson was a bassist, pianist, vocalist, and (wait for it) master barber. She played briefly with the International Sweethearts of Rhythm and Frances Grey’s Queens of Swing, as well as other important women’s groups that came through LA. From 1976 – 1977 she sang with Interdenomination Choir, who toured Israel, Jordan, and more. In 1996, Wilson spoke with music professor and author D. Antoinette Handy, sharing that, “Women musicians should be given more credit for the contribution they have given to the music world.”

73. Laura Ella Dukes aka Little Laura Dukes



Laura Ella Dukes (1907 – 1992), sometimes referred to as Little Laura Dukes (due to her height of 4'7") was an American blues singer and mandolin, banjo, and ukulele player in Memphis, Tennessee from the 1920s to the 1980s. From the late 1950s, Dukes mainly performed in Dixieland groups, and in 1972 she recorded tracks that were first released on the Italian albums, *Blues Oggi* and *Tennessee Blues Vol.1*. She continued to perform in clubs in Memphis in the 1980s.

74. Van Zula Carter Hunt



Born in Somerville, Tennessee, Van Zula Carter Hunt (1901 – 1995) was a guitarist who made a name for herself in the 1910s. She moved to Memphis, where she traveled with numerous groups, including Barnum and Bailey's, and her own group, Madame Hunt's Traveling Show. She played

with local blues artists, including Bessie Smith and Memphis Minnie, recorded a number of songs, and played with the Beale Street Jug Band.

75. Manou Gallo



Manou N'Guessan Gallo is a West African bassist, born on the Ivory Coast in 1972. Her playing style incorporates the rich heritage of her origin, the Djiboi tribe, and her musical career led her to the legendary world music band Zap Mama. In 2009, Gallo won the MAMA Award (MTV Africa) as the “best artist,” and in 2013 *Forbes Africa* named her the only woman among the “Top 10 Best African Bassists.” Her latest album, *Afro Groove Queen*, released in 2018, was produced by Booty Collins.

76. Faith Pillow



In 1963, at just nine years old, Louisville-based Faith Pillow (1954 – 2003) was given her first guitar by her mother. The jazz guitarist and singer spent some time performing in her hometown, but in the early 1970s she moved to Cincinnati to join Dee Felice's jazz quartet, with whom she toured the United States and Caribbean. In the late 1970s, Pillow moved to Chicago to begin her songwriter career, and in 1981 she released her debut self-titled album. She eventually left Chicago, settling in Los Angeles and then Amsterdam, and released three additional albums: *Sanity* (1995), and *Run in the Sunshine* (1996), and *Amsterdam* (2001).

77. Darlene Moreno



Darlene Moreno is best known for being the only woman guitarist to perform with the “Maestro of Love” Barry White. She began touring and recording with the Grammy-winning musician in 1995, joining the Love Unlimited Orchestra for over seven years. She went on to work with other notable musicians including Gerald Albright, who she performed with for six years. In 2015, Moreno suffered a [traumatic head injury](#), and little information about her recovery and career has been publicized since.

78. Cassandra Wilson

Born in Jackson, Mississippi in 1955, jazz musician Cassandra Wilson's love for music stemmed from her parents—her mother was a retired elementary school teacher who loved Motown, and her father a jazz bassist. She was a founder of M-Base, a collective of black Brooklyn musicians in the 1980s, who focused on new sounds, improvisation, and creative expression. Since 1987, Wilson has released 19 solo albums and won numerous awards, including a Grammy Award for Best Jazz Vocal Performance (1997, *New Moon Daughter*), Grammy Award for Best Jazz Vocal Album (2009, *Loverly*), and BET Soul Train Award for Best Traditional Jazz Album (2001, *Silver Pony*).

79. Chaka Khan



Yvette Marie Stevens, better known by her stage name Chaka Khan, is a 10-time Grammy Award-winner who performs under multiple genres, but is best known as the “Queen of Funk.” In the early 1970s, Khan started out her career as lead vocalist of Rufus, but eventually went on to pursue her solo career, releasing 12 albums starting with *Chaka* in 1978. She’s been nominated for induction into the Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Fame twice, has performed with some of the most celebrated musicians, and in 2019 she released, *Hello Happiness*, her first album of original music in 12 years.

80. Maggie Aghomo

There's very little information about, and no recordings or photos of, Nigerian guitarist Maggie Aghomo, who performed with the all-women band, the Originators. She was a pioneer of highlife, and also performed rumba and pop music. The Originators were a result of the dream of Victoria Iruemi (#65 on this list), who hoped to inspire Nigerian women to pick up instruments so that she could lead an all-women band. While Iruemi never had the chance to perform in a band of all women, she did inspire Aghomo and many more to do such.

81. Divinity Roxx



Active since 1993, Divinity Roxx is best known for her work with Beyoncé from 2006-2011. She is a bassist, composer, and so much more. With Beyoncé, Roxx has done some incredible things on bass and as musical director, including appearing in two Beyoncé videos (“Irreplaceable” and “Green Light”), performing at The White House for President Barack Obama and Michelle Obama, and performing on the Grammy’s and other awards and television shows. She’s recorded three solo albums: 2003’s *Ain’t No Other Way*, 2012’s *The Roxx Boxx Experience*, and 2016’s *ImPossible*.

82. Madina N’Diaye



Madina N'Diaye is known for being the first Malian woman to perform with the kora on stage. One of the most symbolic instruments in the Malian musical heritage, traditionally reserved for men, the kora is a 21-string plucked harp made from a gourd. N'Diaye began her professional career with the instrument in 1990, helped by the world's greatest kora player, Toumani Diabaté. N'Diaye went on to perform with African-influenced French band, Lo'Jo, and then formed her own group in 2000. Despite losing her eyesight in 2002, N'Diaye persevered: She went on to tour France and Europe, and released her first solo album in 2004, followed by *Bimogow* in 2011.

83. Wahu



Rosemary Wahu Kagwi, known by her stage name Wahu, is a Kenyan singer-songwriter. Born in Nairobi in 1980 and originally a fashion model, actress, and entrepreneur, Wahu began performing with the guitar in late 1999. Her first single, "Niangalie, was released in 2000, and she went on to become the inaugural recipient of the MTV Africa Music Awards 2008 for Best Female Artist category, and has won a plethora of other music awards in her career.

84. Ruthie Foster



Born in 1964 in Gause, Texas, blues and folk musician Ruthie Foster began her career in gospel. She went on to study music and audio engineering, followed by joining the Navy and singing for the Navy band, Pride, which solidified her love for performing. After leaving the service, Foster signed a contract with Atlantic Records and moved to New York City to pursue a career as a professional musician. Since 1997, Foster has released 10 albums and received numerous awards and nominations, including three Grammy nominations for Best Blues Album.

85. Coot Grant



Coot Grant (1893 – 1970) was born in Birmingham, Alabama, and was a blues vocalist and guitarist from the 1910s through the early 1930s. She is most well-known for her duo with her second husband, Wesley Wilson. The couple wrote over 400 songs during their career, performed and recorded with Louis Armstrong, and wrote the two songs made famous by Bessie Smith, “Gimme a Pigfoot (and a Bottle of Beer)” and “Take Me for a Buggy Ride.”

86. Eileen Chance



While there's very little information available about Eileen Chance, she was best known for her bass playing with the International Sweethearts of Rhythm, Vi Burnside's all-women orchestra, and Tiny Davis's Hell-Divers. In a 1953 issue of [Jet Magazine](#), it was mentioned that Chance was "excited about returning to Trinidad to marry a rich plantation owner she met when the band played there recently." However, a [1962 issue](#) states that Chance embarked on a six-month tour of Sweden with an unnamed all-woman jazz group.

87. Josie Bush

Josie Bush was born in Florence, Mississippi. She learned how to play guitar from an uncle known as "Red" and she married Willie Brown, one of

the pioneer musicians of the Delta blues genre and an influence on Robert Johnson and Muddy Waters. However, it's been claimed by musicologist David Evans that Bush was probably just as good as her husband, and that she even taught her husband many songs.

88. Nora Lee King



Born as Elenore Kingston (1909 – 1995), the singer-songwriter and bassist went under a number of aliases, including Lenore King, Lenore Kinsey, Lola King, Susan King, Susan Lenore King, Nora Lee Lucie, and Nora Lee King Lucie. She recorded with Mary Lou Williams in the 1940s, and her 1950s and 1960s records were accompanied by her husband, guitarist Lawrence Lucie. King owned her own music publishing company, Kinlu Music, and in the early 1960s she and her husband started Toy Records. In the 1980s, the couple started a cable channel from their home in Manhattan that taught viewers how to play guitar, and they toured Europe and America with The Harlem Blues & Jazz Band.

89. Florence G. Joplin

Mother of notable composer and pianist Scott Joplin (often called the “King of Ragtime”), Florence G. Joplin (1841 – 1881) was a singer and banjo player. After her husband, Giles, left Joplin for another woman and, in turn, to care for her six children on her own in Texarkana, Arkansas, she struggled to support her family through domestic work. However, it was

noted by biographer Susan Curtis that Joplin's support and introductory music education for Scott was a large reason for the couples separation and Scott's success.

90. Anna Mae Winburn



Most known for directing the International Sweethearts of Rhythm, Anna Mae Winburn (1913 – 1999) was a jazz vocalist, bandleader, and guitarist. Born in Port Royal, Tennessee, she moved with her family to Kokomo, Indiana, where she performed in various clubs under the name Anita Door. She then moved to Nebraska, where she played guitar for a variety of bands led by Red Perkins. Winburn was the leader of the International Sweethearts of Rhythm from 1941 through 1949.

91. Yvonne Plummer



Yvonne Plummer (1919 – 2013) was born in Brighton, England, and started her musical career with the bagpipes. Arriving in the United States in 1935, Plummer worked at Piney Woods, an African American boarding school in Mississippi where the International Sweethearts of Rhythm was formed, from 1939 – 1942, occasionally performing on saxophone and guitar with the Swinging Rays of Rhythm.

92. Olivia Sophie L'ange Porter Shipp

Born in New Orleans, Louisiana, Olivia Porter (1880 – 1980) learned how to play bass in 1917 after she moved to New York City to join her older sister, May, to pursue a career as a musician. By the late 1920s, Porter has started her own band, the Jazz Mines, and went on to establish the Negro Women's Orchestral and Civic Association.

93. Sona Jobarteh



Born in The Gambia of West Africa, Sona Jobarteh is carrying on her family's musical legacy that dates back 700 years. She was born into one of the five principal Griot families from West Africa, and is the first woman kora player to come from a Griot family as, traditionally, the kora is passed down from father to son. Jobarteh gave her first performance when she was only four years old at London's Jazz Cafe. Read our 2018 feature on Jobarteh [here](#).

94. Elizabeth Foster

The often unrecognized sister of jazz bassist George "Pops" Foster, Elizabeth Foster performed on mandolin, violin, and bass with The Foster Trio, a late-nineteenth-century family band that performed quadrilles, polkas, and rags in Donaldsonville, Louisiana.

95. Adelaide Louise Hall



A major performer in the Harlem Renaissance, Adelaide Louise Hall (1901 – 1993) was born in Brooklyn but relocated to London in 1938. She pioneered scat singing, is widely acknowledged as one of the world’s first jazz singers, and was the first female vocalist to sing and record with Duke Ellington. Hall entered the *Guinness Book of World Records* in 2003 as the world’s most enduring recording artist having released material over eight consecutive decades. She played guitar and ukulele, and performed at the 1933 World Fair in Chicago, where she was referred to as “the darling girl with the guitar and the mellifluous voice” by the Pittsburgh Courier.

96. Esther Mae Scott



Blues singer and guitarist Esther Mae Scott (1893 – 1979) was never recognized as widely as her contemporaries, including Gertrude “Ma” Rainey and Bessie Smith. She learned how to play the guitar at eight years old, and left home at 14 to join the vaudeville group, W.S. Wolcott’s Rabbit Foot Minstrels. Scott eventually gave up music to become a maid, but revived her performing career when she moved to Washington, DC in 1958. She performed at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival and released her only album, *Mama Ain’t Nobody’s Fool* at 78 years old in 1971, which included the backup vocals of the not-yet-famous Emmylou Harris.

97. Mattie Delaney

Vocalion

Tallahatchie River Blues

—Delaney—

Mattie Delaney
Vocal with Guitar

MANUFACTURED BY
THE BRUNSWICK-BALKE-COLLENDER COMPANY

Mattie Delaney (1905 – date unknown) was a Delta blues singer and guitarist active during the 1930s. Aside from her two sole recordings on Vocalion Records, “Down the Big Road Blues” and “Tallahatchie River Blues,” there’s very few confirmed facts about Delaney’s life.

98. Mother McCollum



Mother McCollum
Sanctified Singer with G

Often billed as the “Sanctified Singer with Guitar,” there is little information available about the Mississippi-born Mother McCollum, aside from her six known blues/gospel recordings from the 1930s: “Jesus is My Air-O-Plane,” “Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!” “You Can’t Hide,” “Oh Lord I’m Your Child,” “When I Take My Vacation in Heaven,” and “I Want to See Him.”

99. Gail Muldrow



Born in San Francisco in 1955, guitarist Gail Muldrow started her career by performing on Sly Stone's 1975 album, *High On You*. She performed with Graham Central Station for two years and is featured on the 1977 album "Now Do U Wanta Dance." Muldrow also played with Prince, Chaka Kahn, and more. In 2003 Gail finally released her debut album, *Cleen Spirit*, followed by four additional solo albums through 2007.

100. LuLu Jackson



LuLu Jackson was a blues singer and guitarist in the 1920s. She recorded a few songs for Vocalion Records in 1928, including "Careless Love Blues," and "You're Going to Leave the Old Home, Jim!"