

GREAT WOMEN OF THE BLUES - 3 week short descriptor

When most people think of the Blues, the first image that comes to mind is a man and his guitar. Yet the truth is that women were the early carriers of this music – certainly the first popularizers of it. ***Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Dinah Washington, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Memphis Minnie, Etta James, Aretha Franklin, Janis Joplin, Nina Simone, Bonnie Raitt*** – each of these women used this ‘truth-telling’ art form to challenge how we think of women, and allow us to hear their frank and powerful voices.

With project photo archives, film, audio clips and sing-a-longs, instructor and Blues vocalist **Pamela Rose** will give much historical and cultural context to America’s enduring art form, while celebrating the lively, ribald, poignant music created by these feisty Blueswomen!

Class #1 – The Beginning

The African diaspora, early ‘trouble’ songs, tent and minstrel shows – ***Vera Hall, Ma Rainey, Sippie Wallace, Ida Cox, Bessie Smith***. We’ll explore how the music theory evolved into the Blues form we hear today, and how Black women of the south, with very little power or freedom, articulated an audacious message of power and independence. These women and their songs broadcast this new voice, while becoming superstars of their era.

Class #2 – Out of the Delta, Into the World

We’ll follow the blues as it moved into the cities with the Great Migration – ***Alberta Hunter, Memphis Minnie, Victoria Spivey, Dinah Washington, Billie Holiday***, and talk about how Blueswomen transformed the music industry from sheet music into the record business we know today. We’ll also start to look at the deep relationship of church and gospel music has with the blues. Plus – short music theory lesson about why the Blues is so unique!

Class #3 – Women With Something to Say – Women Who Rock

We’ll look at how Blueswomen gave voice to the Civil Rights and Women’s Movements in the 60’s – ***Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Etta James, Mavis Staples, Aretha Franklin, Nina Simone***. With rhythm and soul, women continued from the 70’s to today to carry a message of freedom and power – ***Janis Joplin, Big Mama Thornton, Koko Taylor, Ruthie Foster, Susan Tedeschi, Bonnie Raitt***.

