

Women Writing Music

Who composed classical music? We remember the men—Bach, Beethoven, Brahms *et al.* But the many women who composed music have largely been forgotten by history—and on stamps.

Presumably it is because they lived in patriarchal times which held well-defined and discriminatory opinions about gender and the roles of women and men.

The earliest stamps featuring women as composers appeared in the late 1970's. While stamps did commemorate female musicians before that, it was as performers of music written by men rather than as composers in their own right. Thankfully, that is changing.



The 800th anniversary of Hildegard's death, Germany, 1979

Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179) composed some 70 works of liturgical music, in addition to writing scholarly treatises. She was also revered as a visionary, and mystic.



Europa 1983, "Inventions" Liechtenstein



1 of 6 paintings
DDR 1976

Barbara Strozzi (1619–1677) is unnamed and depicted as a courtesan in *The Viola da Gamba Player*, despite being the most prolific composer in mid-17th century Venice. She published eight volumes of almost exclusively secular vocal music with little or no support from the church or a rich patron.



This 1998 stamp identifies **Carreño** as "the greatest pianist of her time"; the label notes that "three of the best pianists in the world have played the piano here [Carnegie Hall]: Frank (sic) Liszt, Teresa Carreño, and Jan Paderewski".

Venezuelan composer **Teresa Carreño** (1853–1917) was internationally renowned as a virtuoso pianist, and was called the "Valkyrie of the Piano". But she is largely forgotten as a composer of a string quartet, serenades for orchestra, choral works, and about 75 works for piano.

Clara Schumann (née Wieck) (1819–1896) was one of the foremost pianists of her day and married to composer Robert Schumann. She was also a gifted composer in her own right, leaving a good body of work, including a Piano Concerto in Am—one critic noted that it was not possible to write a serious review of the Concerto “since we are dealing with the work of a lady.”



Belgium got it right in 2009 by including Clara Schumann as a composer the equal of Purcell, Handel, Haydn and Mendelssohn.

Monaco got it dead wrong in this issue from 1985. On a stamp commemorating Frederic Chopin and Robert Schumann, Clara is unnamed and appears to be hiding behind her husband.

Fanny Mendelssohn–Hensel, a friend of Clara Schumann, was as gifted a composer as her younger brother Felix. She wrote over 450 works—piano trios and quartets, cantatas, over 125 pieces for piano, and more than 250 lieder. Some of her compositions were published under her brother’s name “due to social conventions of the time about the role of women.”



Fanny Mendelssohn–Hensel (1805–1847)

Things are slowly changing. Women composers of the 20th century are being more widely represented on stamps. Countries are commemorating their national composers more often, such as Azerbaijani **Elza Ibrahimova**. France commemorated members of a group of French composers known as “Les Six”, including **Germaine Tailleferre**. Sisters **Nadia & Lili Boulanger** were remembered together; Lili died tragically young, while Nadia taught many great 20th century composers, as well as writing her own music.



Elza Ibrahimova
(1938–2012)



Germaine Tailleferre
(1892–1983)



Sisters Nadia (1887–1979) & Lili Boulanger (1893–1918).