

Great Women of the Blues  
OLLI Berkeley Summer Session  
Pamela Rose

The vital role women played in creating and popularizing American Blues has been sadly overlooked. For it was women who launched this folk music into public consciousness, dominating early gramophone sales and theater marquis, creating a century long love affair with down-to-earth songs of desire, trouble, rapture and despair. Honoring these women, keeping their music and their stories alive, is a crucial piece of our cultural history. Black women of the South, so disenfranchised and under-acknowledged, literally gave voice to the feminist movement and their songs continue to delight and inspire today. The lifework of artists such as *Ma Rainey, Sippie Wallace, Memphis Minnie, Sophie Tucker, Alberta Hunter, Dinah Washinton, Ruth Brown, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Janis Joplin, Nina Simone, Aretha Franklin, Etta James and Bonnie Raitt* are just a few of the artists we will study.

In this 4 part series, instructor Pamela Rose will lead students on a fascinating journey through the history and development of the blues, from early 'trouble' songs to tent and minstrel shows, through TOBA tours and the Chitlin circuit, Chicago, New York and Memphis, onto the first gramophone recordings. With projected archival images, videos, and singalongs, we'll delve deep into those early years, learn the music theory concepts that make this genre so unique, then continue to follow the tradition through early R & B, gospel, and rock and roll.

**Class #1 – The Beginning**

The African diaspora, early 'trouble' songs, tent and minstrel shows – Vera Hall, Ma Rainey, Sippie Wallace, Ida Cox, Bessie Smith

**Class #2 – The Evolution**

We'll learn about (and sing) basic blues music theory, then follow the blues as it moved into the cities with the Great Migration – Alberta Hunter, Memphis Minnie, Victoria Spivey, Dinah Washington, Billie Holiday

**Class #3 – Women Who Had Something to Say**

We'll look at the relationship of the church and gospel music to the blues, and learn how that tradition helped give voice to the Civil Rights and Women's Movements in the 60's – Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Etta James, Mavis Staples and Aretha Franklin

**Class #4 – Women Who Rock**

With rhythm and soul, women continue from the 70's to today to carry a message of freedom and power – Ruth Brown, Janis Joplin, Big Mama Thornton, Bonnie Raitt, Ruthie Foster, Susan Tedeschi

