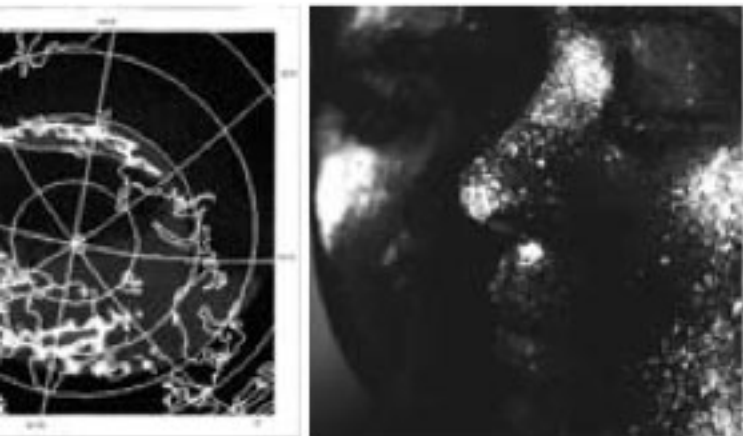


# Laika base culture

Laika, with poetry in the sound of the sibylants, are in turn a sinuous programme band, formed by US expat Margaret Fiedler in London maybe four years ago, and presently going from strength to strength. In early 1997 they released their second full CD set, 'Sounds of the Satellites' which is the interesting fruit of Fiedler and cohort's immersion in programming, and the creativity of pop computer-sourced music. At its best the beat is completely hypnotic, augmented by a live or real time, in-your-body rhythm section, the music chases down an intense groove, showing demonstrably what can be done with rhythm and computers. It's this balance which seemed interesting to take further, and relate it to women, technology and music.

The first time I saw Laika live, in Dingwalls, North London, it left me feeling slightly confused because I felt I wasn't sure what the balance of creative input was, and how much it is about computer programming in the band context. The sound and atmosphere was great and the keyboards and the evening left me imagining remakes of early Neu backed with a power rhythm section. Very hypnotic. I realised though that apart from programming there was also this rhythm section and Margaret Fiedler playing guitar, and keyboards. I'd never heard a woman play a guitar like her, something you can put down to a sheltered upbringing, but still, maybe, unusual.

Some weeks later I catch the group a second time at a summer festival near Brighton. In the early warm afternoon sun Laika they're only another band – a far cry from the sweaty packed enthusiasm of Dingwalls. What it must be like to play to audience after audience and to get next to no response. Again there's a subtlety



to the colour and texture of the sound that was absent from the previous groups. It's a deep sinuous repetition, with floating pointillistic keyboards over the top of the sound. The Laika woman, Margaret Fiedler, is wearing blue again, which is an image riddle for me to fathom, though probably it's merely because it's a garment she likes. Up above the stage, a seagull chases a crow some where near halfway through their set.

Connecting up with Fiedler, again through comtech, there's talk of Margaret writing something

about her experience of programming. How and whether she felt it could be different to 'male programming' and whether computer programming could be viewed to contain a gender dimension? In the event, Margaret finds it difficult to get a handle on music programming and female energy, or however the link might be described. She does however send some thoughts down the fibre-optic wires. Here along with the briefest herstory of female composers as per Fiedler, are those reflections (OL):

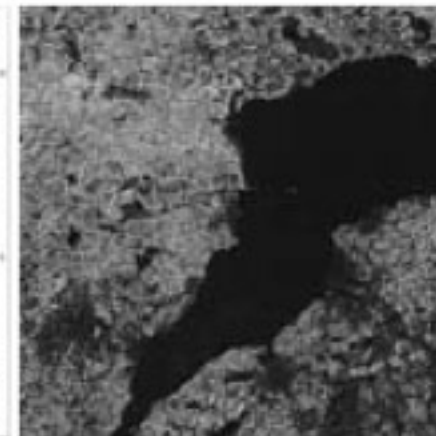
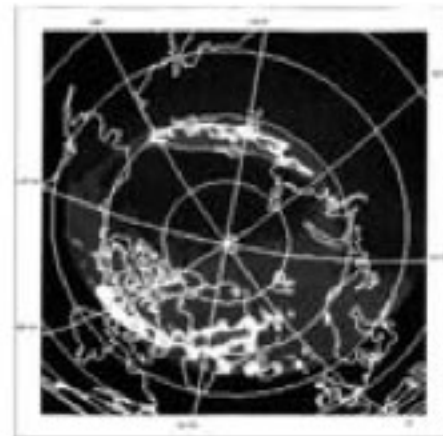
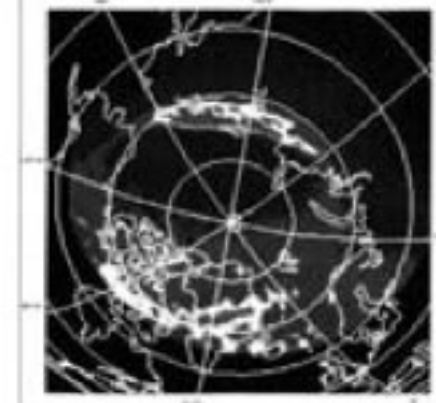
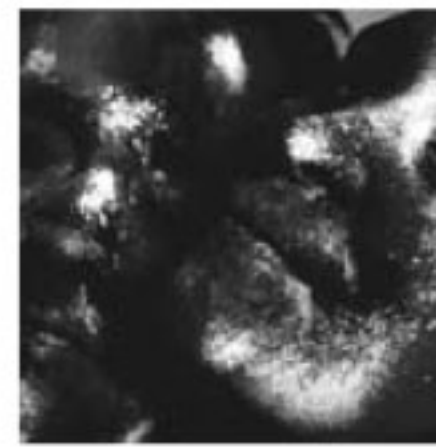
I work in the non-rock area of popular music, for want of a better description. It's very hard to talk about women composing music because I only have my own experience – which is telling in itself. I honestly don't know what I'd do with myself if I weren't doing music – that's why the Nadia Boulanger quote appealed to me (see below). I guess I had certain 'advantages' – like getting a computer when I was 8, or playing cello from a really young age, or being in my first band when I was 15, or going to a school that had one of four electronic music studios for high school students in the United States. So music, computers, electronic or acoustic are all areas I'm comfortable in. I write and play music because it's the only job I want to do that I'm good at. Everything else I either can't do, or don't want to.

Techno, drum and bass and ambient (and all the other sub-groups of the new, largely programmed electronic music) have extremely few women. It seems strange as the new home-recorded electronic genres would be ideally suited to anyone feeling their way into composition. But there still really aren't many women working as producer/programmers in dance music. There's Andrea Parker but with just 2 singles under her belt it's hard to say whether she's gonna make any lasting impact and open doors for more women on Mo' Wax. It's possibly because there is a definite trainpotter aspect to dance music (i.e., largely 12" single based with a quick turnover) and to keep up with the latest sounds requires a lot of research and expense when women are being marketed at more aggressively to spend their money on clothes and cosmetics.

I am genuinely surprised at the lack of women getting involved in more electronic popular music – it seems the environment in which it's created (i.e., home, with no (usually) male heads looking over your shoulder like in a commercial recording studio) – a small home studio setup (sampler, sequencer, DAT) seems like the perfect space in which budding female artists could feel their way into making music with no pressure – no one telling you the 'right' way to do it (as if there is one) and just getting on and making your own mistakes and in the end hopefully your own successes. It's like the Virginia Woolf *A Room of One's Own* – a private space for women to feel free to create in – new computer-based music seems ideally suited to this. Go figure why there are so few women doing it...

*Do not take up music unless you would rather die than not to do so.* NADIA BOULANGER

## anima sampling



### A BRIEF HERSTORY OF FEMALE COMPOSERS

**St Cecilia** – the patron saint of music and inventor of the organ

**Sappho** – set poems to music composed on the lyre

**Hildegard von Bingen** – a poet and composer, physicist and doctor, female, and in the Dark Ages

**Barbara Strozzi** – born illegitimately in 17th century Venice she composed some of the most highly original and extraordinary music of her time

**Elisabeth Claude Jacquet de la Guerre** – a child prodigy whose operas, ballet, and cantatas were mostly destroyed in the French Revolution

**Maria Theresia von Paradis** – taught by Salieri and so impressed Mozart that he wrote a piano concerto for her

**Fanny Mendelssohn** – although easily her younger brother's equal, she neglected her talent in order to promote his

**Clara Schumann** – one of the greatest piano virtuosos of the 19th century and companion to two of its greatest composers – her husband and Johannes Brahms

**Suffragette Dame Ethel Smyth** – wrote operas as well as books on feminism, the state of the British Empire and old English sheepdogs

**Amy Beach** – composer of the first symphony by an American woman

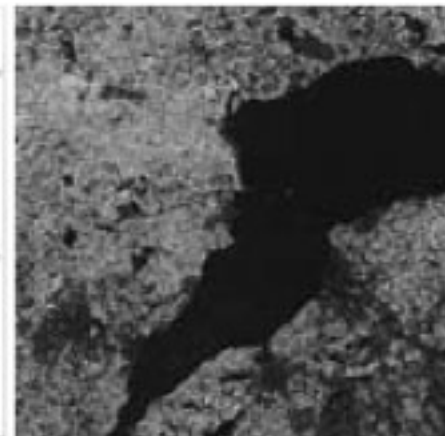
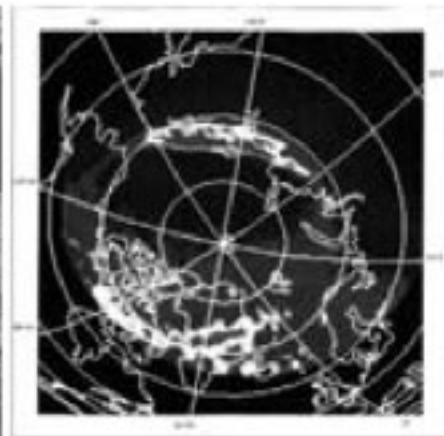
**Nadia and Lili Boulanger** – the sister team of composer and teacher/conductor

**Germaine Tailleferre** – experimenter in twelve-tone serialism and member of Les Six (along with Jean Cocteau)

**Ruth Crawford Seeger** – composed as well as compiling and transcribing over 1000 American folk songs

**Mary Lou Williams** – the first female composer to gain acceptance in the male dominated world of jazz

**Dame Elisabeth Lutyens** – an innovative composer whose radical style was not easily accepted in England of the 1940's



**Thea Musgrave** – composed in both 12-tone and electronic music

**Pauline Oliveros** – her 'sonic meditation' often consisted of composing for mynah birds and emulating jungle animals

**Ellen Taaffe Zwilich** – first female winner of the Pulitzer Prize for music

**Laurie Anderson** – taking direction from John Cage and making it her own – even making the Top 10

OK, so that's the history of female composers. That's it. One (long-ish) paragraph, if strung all together – Margaret Fiedler

*Margaret Fiedler is one half of Laika. The releases, including 'Sound of the Satellites', are on Too Pure.*

