

Activity Idea

Gender Expansiveness and Queer Electronic Music *Recommended for Adults*

LGBTQ+ history is intrinsically linked to electronic music and the rave and dance culture that sprang from it. There is a nebulous ever-changing movement of discovery and uncovering in the best of the genre. From the late seventies disco queen Sylvester based out of San Francisco to the electric hyper pop brilliance of SOPHIE who passed away suddenly in 2021, the range is vast. As infinite as queerness itself.

In the 1970s, electronic music began having a significant influence on popular music. Genres such as disco, new wave and synthpop emerged, bringing with them an air of gender ambiguity in many of their most prominent artists. These artists used polyphonic synthesizers, electronic drums, and drum machines. In the 1980s, popular music adopted the trend, beginning to rely more and more on synthesizers, programmable drum machines, and bass synthesizers. Early in that decade, a group of musicians and music merchants developed the Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI).

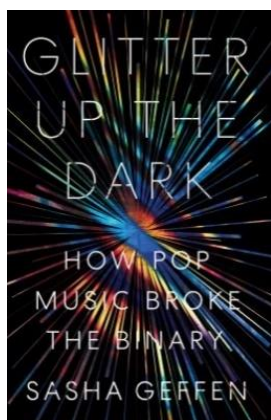
From MIDI, samplers became the next innovation. They allowed anyone to record a small piece of music and play it as a one-shot loop or in various pitches with a keyboard. Anything can be danceable if it is repeated enough time. This led to rave, house, and the emergence of using home computers to run music software. From there, software such as Ableton Live and ProTools became the new way for creative expression.

In recent years, computer technology has become more accessible and music software has advanced. Interacting with music production technology is now possible using means that bear no relationship to traditional musical performance practices. The palette of sounds is now vast.

Queerness seeps through it all with unexpected transitions. Where did that texture come from, and why did it never return? Why are two arpeggiated synths slightly out of tune? The discordant part is the essential part. These musicians make the invisible visible, as everything must come to the surface eventually. Their queerness and transness unite them, as their music proclaims:

I am here.
I am queer.
I deserve to take up space.
I am worthy of all things wonderful.
I am not alone in my journey.

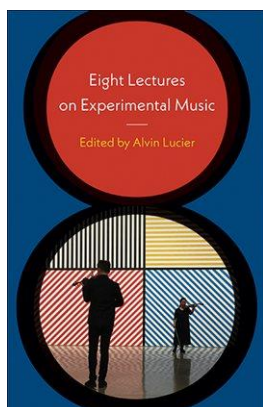
Books



Glitter up the dark: How Pop Music Broke the Binary
Author: Sasha Geffen

"Is our love of pop music innately queer? That's the question Sasha Geffen answers--with a "yes," of course--in this book. Geffen identifies artists of all stripes who performed "outside the limitations of their assigned genders." This musical androgyny, they argue, is the result of different factors at different points in the timeline, but the flexibility of the human voice in pop music emerges as the most consistent form of expression."

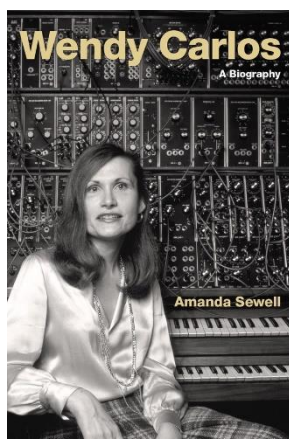
Catalog Link: <https://tinyurl.com/yvauum8y>



Eight Lectures on Experimental Music
Author: Various Authors

"Brilliant lectures by the most influential experimental music composers of our time. In this brilliant collection, path-breaking figures of American experimental music discuss the meaning of their work at the turn of the twenty-first century. Presented between 1989 and 2002 at Wesleyan University, these captivating lectures provide rare insights by composers whose work has shaped our understanding of what it means to be."

Catalog Link (Available as an ebook via Hoopla):
<https://tinyurl.com/5n6vu5xt>



Wendy Carlos: A Biography
Author: Amanda Sewell

"With her debut album *Switched-On Bach*, composer and electronic musician Wendy Carlos (b. 1939) brought the sound of the Moog synthesizer to a generation of listeners, helping to effect arguably one of the most substantial changes in popular music's sound since musicians began using amplifiers. Her story is not only one of a person who blazed new trails in electronic music for decades but is also the story of a person who intersected in many ways with American popular culture, medicine, and social trends during the second half of the 20th century and well into the public has received her and her music."

Catalog Link: <https://tinyurl.com/muz38jcm>

For more books and other items, it is highly recommended that you visit the special LGBTQ+ Collection at the West Hollywood Library.

Videos



Keyboard fantasies the Beverly Glenn-Copeland

"As a sci-fi obsessed woman living in near isolation, Beverly Glenn-Copeland wrote and self-released Keyboard Fantasies in Huntsville, Ontario back in 1986. Recorded in an Atari-powered home studio, the cassette featured seven tracks of a curious folk-electronica hybrid, a sound realized far before its time. An intimate coming of age story spinning pain and the suffering of prejudice into rhythm, hope and joy."

Catalog Link: <https://tinyurl.com/muf5ze3d>



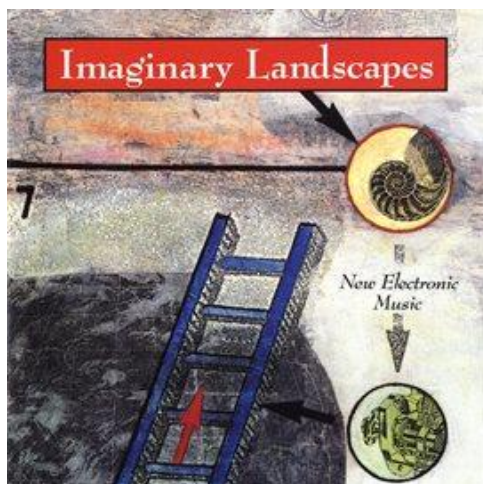
Sisters with Transistors

"Follows the story of electronic music's female pioneers, composers who embraced machines and their liberating technologies to utterly transform how we produce and listen to music today."

Kanopy Link:

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/product/12168721>

Audio Recordings



Imaginary Landscapes: Various Artists, 1988

"In 1939, John Cage composed Imaginary Landscape No. 1 for two record players, piano, and percussion, ushering in the movement of live electronic music. This album includes recordings made at the 1988 Imaginary Landscapes festival in downtown Manhattan, among others, illustrating how far and wide electronic music had grown."

Hoopla Link: <https://tinyurl.com/4mjh5t2f>



Kick I, 2020
Artist: Arca

“In the three years since her acclaimed 2017 album *Arca*, Ghera has fallen in love and simultaneously found confidence from affirming her non-binary identity. If her previous album evoked a melancholy sci-fi opera set on a drifting space station, *KiCk i* is a live-streamed party, finding Ghera at her most unrestrained, mischievous and joyful.”

Catalog Link: <https://tinyurl.com/5n6p29a4>



Dreams Of A Dancefloor EP, 2024
Artist: Octo Octa

“*Dreams of a Dancefloor*” is the latest EP by Octo Octa (aka Maya Bouldry-Morrison) on her label T4T LUV NRG. Maya spent the last 3 years perfecting her engineering on these three sensual, beautiful, and enveloping songs.

Freegal Link: <https://tinyurl.com/dfu8j5ww>



Saves The World, 2019
Artist: Muna

“With their hypnotic 80s dance tracks and addictive sing-out-loud song lyrics, Katie Gavin, Josette Maskin, and The album boasts 12 sensational tracks that are intimate, wildly entertaining, and most of all, inspiring.”

Freegal link: <https://tinyurl.com/3xd7sc4a>



Websites

"Queer Artists Who Shaped Music History" by Bryan Parys

Take a deep dive into queer artists shaping the current musical landscape with this playlist curated by Berklee Online. Given that fearlessness and imagination are essential attributes of any artist, it's not surprising that queer artists, for whom fear and fearlessness are daily facts of existing, have given the world such gifts of imagination."

<https://tinyurl.com/3fcxjn88>

SOPHIE

Sophie Xeon was a Los Angeles based record producer, singer, songwriter, and DJ who worked under the stage name Sophie (stylised as SOPHIE). Her elastic and electric hyper-pop sounds moved a generation, as was her vulnerability to explore her gender expression.

<https://tinyurl.com/yv2pbrfc>

An audio introduction to Lauren Bousfield, Wire Magazines, June 2023

The dizzying speed, ruthless nature and dark consequences of consumerist culture are themes that Bousfield has been interrogating via her high-tempo maximalist productions continuously throughout her decades-long career.

<https://tinyurl.com/u2n5sj3n>

8 Trans and Queer Artists on Dance Music's LGBTQ+ History by Matt Moen

"For anyone that's done their homework, there should be no question that the history of dance music is unmistakably queer. Originating in the '80s, it's a well-known fact that disco — and house later — got its start in queer nightlife. "

<https://tinyurl.com/2dur9peb>