

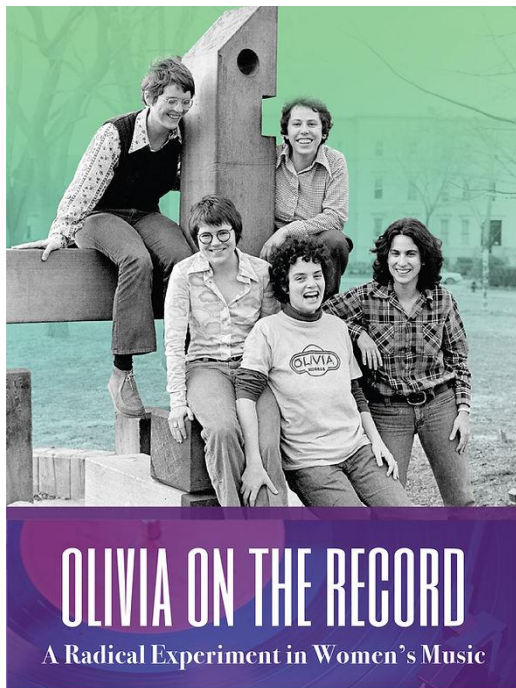
# Olivia on the Record

**A Radical Experiment in Women's Music**

Ginny Z Berson

Resource Guide 2023

## Book Description



**Ginny Z Berson**

The burgeoning lesbian and feminist movements of the '70s and '80s created an impetus to form more independent and equitable social and cultural institutions—bookstores, publishers, health clinics, and more—to support the unprecedented surge in women's arts of all kinds. Olivia Records was at the forefront of these models, not only recording and distributing women's music but also creating important new social spaces for previously isolated women and lesbians through concerts and festivals.

Ginny Z. Berson, one of Olivia's founding members and visionaries, kept copious records during those heady days—days also fraught with contradictions, conflicts, and economic pitfalls. With great honesty, Berson offers her personal take on what those times were like, revisiting the excitement and the hardships of creating a fair and equitable lesbian-feminist

business model—one that had no precedent.

## About the Author



Ginny Z Berson is a long-time political activist driven by a longing for justice. She was a member of The Furies-- a radical lesbian feminist separatist collective in Washington, D.C. that lived and worked collectively to develop lesbian feminist political thought and philosophy. They produced a mostly monthly newspaper, The Furies, that was distributed nationally and had a significant impact on women's groups all over the U.S. Ginny was a regular contributor and member of the editorial staff.

After The Furies broke up, Ginny pulled together a group of women in D.C. to begin visioning and planning what would become Olivia Records, the national women's record company. She and her partner, the musician Meg Christian, were the initial driving force getting Olivia off the ground. Ginny stayed at Olivia for seven plus years, and during that time the

Olivia collective produced records by Meg, Cris Williamson, BeBe K'Roche, Linda Tillery, Teresa Trull, Mary Watkins, a poetry album by Pat Parker and Judy Grahn, and Lesbian Concentrate—a "lesbianthology" in response to a rising wave of homophobia. After leaving Olivia in 1980, Ginny worked for many years in community radio---at KPFA-FM, Pacifica Radio, and the National Federation of Community Broadcasters.

She then spent 8 years as Director of Outreach for World Trust Educational Services, an anti-racist educational organization that produces documentary films, curricula, workshops and trainings. She also does racial equity work in her neighborhood as part of Neighbors for Racial Justice.

### **Praise for Olivia on the Record**

"In a time when lesbians' participation in mainstream culture and politics is often taken for granted, we need to recognize the miraculousness of what Olivia achieved. A few years after Stonewall, Olivia not only created the first women's record label, but in the face of pervasive

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bigotry and repression carved out a vibrant political space for lesbian freedom." —Barbara Smith, co-founder of the Combahee River Collective

"The women's music movement was a revolution for rights and dignity, carving out a space where none existed before: for women to seize ownership of their own narrative, for lesbians who had never been reflected in popular music, for women to write love songs to other women. A small collective of idealistic women with absolutely no experience in the music business created a model that would change the landscape for all women, indeed, for all people." —Vicki Randle, musician

"Ginny Berson's important memoir of building Olivia Records into a beloved lesbian institution is a timely narrative from a founding organizer. Ginny walks us through the politics, radical self-discovery, aching romantic tension, and quirky community organizing that characterized an era. In these chapters, we gain a front row seat to the collective "processing" that produced and distributed lesbian records, and meet the first generation of fans to experience women's music as lesbian liberation." —Bonnie J. Morris, PhD, author of *Eden Built by Eves*, *The Disappearing L*, and *The Feminist Revolution*

"A small group of queer women decided to take on the record industry, the patriarchy, and capitalism so that women could have music that reflected their lives. It was ground-breaking and gave us new systems for making and recording music that valued love, kindness and justice." — Lily Tomlin, comedienne

## Awards

- Foreword INDIES 2020 Silver Award Winner in LGBTQ+ Nonfiction
- Independent Press Awards 2021 Winner in LGBTQ nonfiction
- Golden Crown Literary Awards 2021 Nonfiction Winner

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# Resources

## Teacher testimonials

"As an historian of the women's music movement (and the present archivist for Olivia Records), I heartily welcomed the publication of Ginny Berson's *Olivia on the Record* as a much-needed account of early Olivia history. The book proved invaluable for the women's music movement seminar I was planning for the University of California at Berkeley, and students in that class quickly warmed to Ginny's honest style and story-telling. The lessons on social justice, unlearning racism, and approaches to feminist workplace models truly opened the eyes of my students (who came from all over the world.) Several remarked they had no idea that lesbian feminists of the 1970s were already thinking and acting on intersectionality--yes, we were! And having a volume like Ginny's, to give to readers unfamiliar with the early women's music scene, is the best way to create intergenerational dialogue about what was accomplished--and what remains unfinished. By the end of the course the students were eager to hear the music and see the posters, album art and press releases Ginny described, so we had a genuine field trip to the Olivia archives, and confronted with material "proof" of all they had just read about, a few students stood under a poster of Meg Christain and wept. Few history assignments evoke such a personal response, and I hope the book becomes part of other college courses: paired with the music, certainly!" - Bonnie J. Morris, Department of History, UC-Berkeley

## Classes assigned in

- UC Berkeley:
  - HIST 103D 002: Proseminar: Problems in Interpretation of U.S. History: The Sound of Women's History

## More about Olivia On the Record

The logo for Aunt Lute Records, featuring the words "aunt lute" in a lowercase, cursive script font, enclosed within a thin black rectangular border.

- [How a feminist, lesbian music collective powerfully defended trans rights in 1970s Los Angeles](#) (Pink News)
- ['Olivia on the Record' Book Launch Recording](#)
- [Why read Olivia on the Record?](#) (Shephard)
- [The best books on the women's music movement](#) (Shephard)
- [Don't Die Wondering - Wellesley Centers for Women](#) (WRB)
- [Olivia Records Musicians Keep a Lesbian Feminist Legacy Alive | KQED](#) (KQED)
- [Olivia on the Record | auntlutebooks](#)
- [Liberation Start with "L": An Olivia Records Story transcript](#)
- [Because of a song: Holly Near celebrates Oakland's women's music scene with new online archive](#) (Bay Area Reporter)
- [The fight to Dump Trump and lesbian feminism of the 70's. | KPFA](#)
- [THE CHANGER AND THE CHANGED: A HISTORY OF THE WOMEN'S MUSIC MOVEMENT](#)

## More about Olivia Records

- ['Our sound engineer got a death threat': how lesbian label Olivia shook up music](#) (The Guardian)
- [At Home with Olivia - "I Know You Know" with Judy Dlugacz & Ginny Z Berson](#)
- [12 Essential Songs From the Lesbian Label Olivia Records - The New York Times](#)
- [Cris Williamson Celebrates 50 Years of Olivia Records & Women's Music With 'The Grand Reunion,' Jan. 6 & 7 • Country Queer](#)
- [Olivia Records | East Bay Express | Oakland, Berkeley & Alameda](#)
- [Olivia Records, a Healthy Gain in 15 Years - Los Angeles Times](#)
- [How Olivia Became The Most Successful Lesbian Business Of All Time | Autostraddle](#)
- [OLIVIA: If It Weren't For The Music - Lesbian News](#)
- [Cruising to Success](#)
- [Meg Christian | Making Gay History](#)
- [Olivia Timeline: From Grassroots to World's Largest Lesbian Travel Company - San Francisco Bay Times](#)
- [Olivia Records' Judy Dlugacz and Cris Williamson to Receive Americana Jack Emerson Lifetime Achievement Award for Executive](#)

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- [How Should We Archive the Soundtrack to 1970s Feminism?](#)

## More about Ginny Z Berson

- [Ginny Berson, Activist, Olivia Records & Racial Justice](#) (JUST SAY IT)
- [Ginny Berson - The Outwords Archive](#)
- [Ginny Berson, author Olivia On the Record](#) (KGUA)
- [Veteran Feminists of America Pioneer Histories: Ginny Z. Berson](#)
- [Twelve Years of Lesbian Activism](#)
- [B-E Collection presents: Ginny Berson / Director for WTES / Co Founder Olivia Records](#)

## Keep reading!

Texts below are based on Bonnie J. Morris' UC Berkeley class where she taught Olivia on the Record.

- Jamie Anderson, An Army of Lovers
- Candie Carawan, Sing For Freedom
- Angela Davis, Blues Legacies and Black Feminism
- Caroline Mitchell, Women and Radio: Airing Differences
- Lucy O'Brien, She-Bop: The Definitive History of Women in Popular Music
- Linda Ronstadt, Simple Dreams
- Jennifer Lynn Stoeber, The Sonic Color Line

Also worth a read is The Feminist Revolution: The Struggle for Women's Liberation by Bonnie J. Morris and D-M Withers.

## Where to get a copy

- [Olivia on the Record: A Radical Experiment in Women's Music](#)
  - [Purchase the book from Small Press Distribution](#) or your local independent bookstore
  - Ebooks

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- [Amazon](#)
- [B&N Nook](#)
- [Kobo](#)

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