

Celebrating Women’s History Month: Female Songwriters

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Female songwriters have been registering works for Copyright protection for more than 147 years. They appear as far back as book one of the *Copyright Record Book*. In that book, publisher A. Wundermann registered entry number 40, the waltz *Isola Bella (Isle of Beauty)*, composed by Elise S. Hamilton, on July 15, 1870. Also in book one, Fanny Haskell registered the musical composition *Nineteen Hundred*, Charlotte Blume registered the musical composition *My Desire* (written by J. William Pope), and Mrs. G. De la Matte registered her book *Piano and Musical Matters*.

While men were more well-known as jazz composers in the early twentieth century, a handful of women wrote commercial hits and other jazz standards. Irene Higginbotham composed nearly fifty songs, including her most famous “Good Morning Heartache,” first recorded by Billie Holiday and later by Diana Ross. Dorothy Fields wrote lyrics for more than 400 songs, many of them for Cotton Club reviews performed by Duke Ellington. She co-wrote the standards “The Way You Look Tonight,” “On the Sunny Side of the Street,” and “Pick Yourself Up,” performed by artists including Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, and Louis Armstrong.

Since then, the number of women registering works with the Office has increased dramatically. Singer-songwriter Carole King has many songs registered with the Office. In her early career, she co-wrote songs with her husband Gerry Goffin for

Bobby Vee, The Drifters, Herman’s Hermits, The Chiffons, The Monkees, and Aretha Franklin. She eventually began recording her songs herself, and her second album, *Tapestry*, was a huge success. It featured hits “I feel the Earth Move,” “You’ve Got a Friend,” and “Where You Lead,” which

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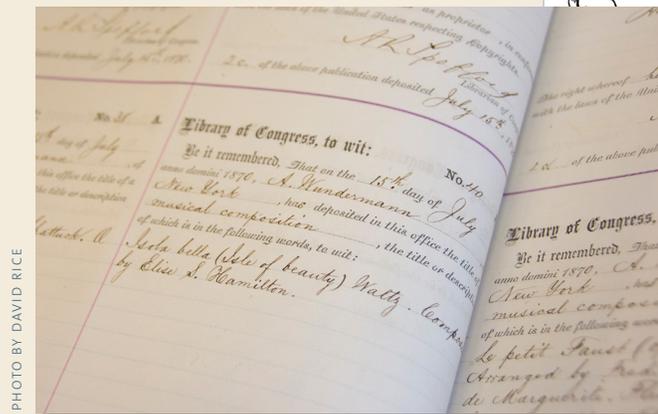
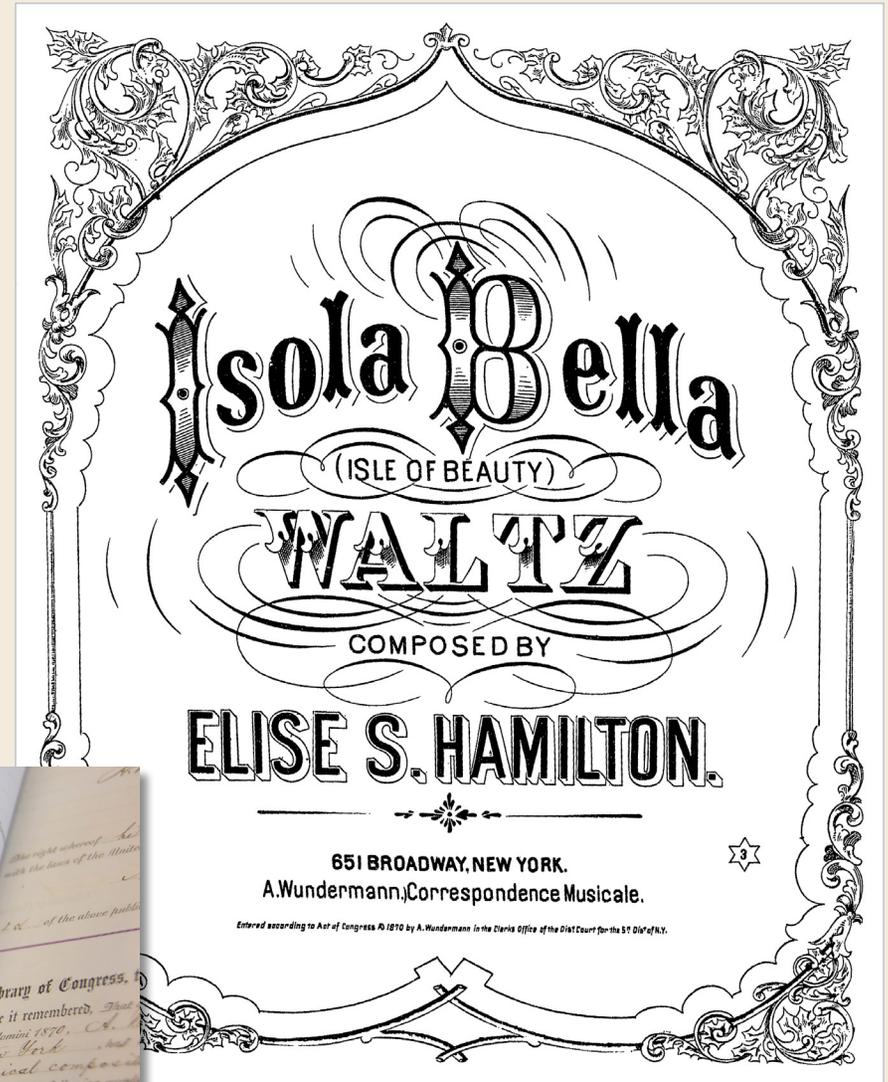


PHOTO BY DAVID RICE



Isola Bella (Isle of Beauty) is the first work by a female to be registered with the Copyright Office in 1870.



PHOTO BY WALTER ALBERTIN



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was later revised and recorded with her daughter Louise Goffin to be the theme for the television show *Gilmore Girls*. King was named the recipient of the Library's **Gershwin Prize for Popular Song** in 2012, and she's the only female to have received the honor so far.

One of the most prevalent female songwriters found in the copyright registration records is Diane Warren. She has written or co-written nearly 2,000 songs registered with the Office. Warren wrote songs made famous by Aerosmith, Chicago, Gloria Estefan, Celine Dion, Cher, Mariah Carey, Carrie Underwood, Michael Bolton, and Whitney Houston—just to name a few. Her first hit was “Solitaire,” which Laura Branigan performed and took to number seven on the U.S. pop charts in 1983.

Women continue to write songs and register them with the Office. Beyoncé wrote or co-wrote most of the songs she recorded with the group Destiny's Child and as a solo artist. In 2001, she became the first African American woman and second female lyricist to win the Pop Songwriter of the Year award at the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers Pop Music Awards. That year she also became the third woman to have writing credits on three number one songs in a single year (Carole King was the first, Mariah Carey the second).

In Nashville, women such as Martina McBride and Sara Evans have enjoyed success writing both for themselves and other artists. Elsie McWilliams, one of the few women in the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame, wrote for Jimmie Rogers in the 1920s. Marijohn Wilkin, known as the Den Mother of Music Row, wrote many country songs in the fifties and sixties and also wrote songs recorded by Rod Stewart and Mick Jagger. Beth Nielson Chapman, the most recent woman to be inducted into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame, wrote songs performed by Trisha Yearwood, Tanya Tucker, Lorrie Morgan, Crystal Gayle, and Willie Nelson. She also co-wrote Faith Hill's hit “This Kiss.”

A group of female Nashville singer-songwriters formed the Song Suffragettes, a collective that performs weekly and has featured nearly 200 women in the past three years. Through the collective, more than thirty performers have received publishing deals, enabling female country songwriters to continue to share their creativity, as they have been doing since 1870. ©

Top left, Dorothy Fields sits at a piano with Arthur Schwartz working on the score to “A Tree Grows in Brooklyn”.

Right, Carole King performs at a concert honoring her with the Gershwin Prize for Popular Song in 2013.