

Guide to the Pauline Oliveros Papers, 1969-2015
Finding aid prepared by Alexandria Post
Special Collections, F.W. Olin Library
Mills College

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Finding aid prepared by Alexandria Post.

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Descriptive Summary:

Title: Pauline Oliveros papers

Identifier: Consult repository

Date (bulk): 1981 - 2008

Date (inclusive): 1969 - 2015

Creator: Oliveros, Pauline, 1932-2016

Extent: 16 linear feet (34 manuscript boxes, 1 half manuscript box, 1 oversize box, and 1 oversize folder)

Repository:

Special Collections, F.W. Olin Library, Mills College
5000 MacArthur Boulevard
Oakland, CA 94613

Language: Materials represented in collection are primarily English. Some German and French materials.

Abstract: The Pauline Oliveros collection documents the professional career of composer, accordionist and performer, Pauline Oliveros. The bulk of the collection consists of compositions and events programs from projects Oliveros completed after leaving the University of California, San Diego (1981) to become an independent composer and performer in Upstate New York.

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions: Open for use by qualified researchers.

Acquisition: Papers donated by Pauline Oliveros in 2013. Additions to collection ongoing.

Publication Rights: Contact the Special Collections Curator, F.W. Olin Library, Mills College, for copyright information and permission to publish.

Preferred Citation: [item], Pauline Oliveros papers, Special Collections, F.W. Olin Library, Mills College.

Related Collections and Publications:

Pauline Oliveros Papers, University of California, San Diego

Processing information: Processed by Mills College Library Special Collections Staff.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged in eight series, some of which are further broken down into subseries:

- Series 1: Compositions
- Series 2: Events Publicity and Programs
- Series 3: Correspondence
- Series 4: Photographs
- Series 5: Publications
- Series 6: Projects
- Series 7: Miscellany
- Series 8: Mills and Other Institutions
- Series 9: Oversize

Biographical Note:

Pauline Oliveros was born in 1932 in Houston, Texas in what was then a rural area of the city dotted with farms, pecan orchards, and berry patches. Its rich soundscape, saturated with choruses of natural sounds made by birds, frogs, cicadas, and other insects, inspired the young musician's lifetime exploration of environmental sound.

In 1952, Oliveros moved to San Francisco, where she studied composition with Robert Erickson and joined a close-knit community of like-minded musicians, dancers, poets, actors, and visual artists. Oliveros pioneered collaborative mixed-media compositions with electronic sounds, light projections, and theatrical elements during the 1960s. She also created tape music compositions now considered classic works in the history of electronic music and contributed to the early development of free improvisation. Along with composers Ramon Sender and Morton Subotnick, Oliveros co-founded the San Francisco Tape Music Center in 1961 and became the director of the center when it moved to Mills College in Oakland in the fall of 1966. She established a progressive, open-minded creative vision at the Mills Tape Music Center (later renamed the Center for Contemporary Music), which, after a half century, continues today.

In 1967, Oliveros accepted a position at the University of California, San Diego and was a vital part of its new music program for fourteen years. In 1985, she established the Pauline Oliveros Foundation (subsequently renamed the Deep Listening Institute and now the Center for Deep Listening at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute), a non-profit organization supporting the creation, presentation, and dissemination of experimental music. She returned to Mills College in 1996 as the Darius Milhaud Composer in Residence. Although in 2001 Oliveros accepted a position as Distinguished Research Professor of Music at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, she continued to teach a composition seminar at Mills every year.

Oliveros was a staunch advocate for women composers both as a teacher and in her writings. Her essay "And Don't Call Them Lady Composers" appeared in the New York Times in 1970, long before feminist musicology gained momentum. She also made path-breaking contributions to feminist aesthetics by advancing a non-hierarchical performance practice based on alternatives to traditional assumptions concerning the separation of performer and audience, authorship, and talent. Oliveros developed a new form of integrated listening in the 1970s through her work with an all-women improvisation ensemble and the research she pursued with a team that included a dance kinesiologist, a psychologist, specialists in biofeedback, and an optical physicist. These activities culminated with her *Sonic Meditations* (1974), a series of compositions consisting of verbal instructions aimed at cultivating a form of integrated listening that applies what she described as focal and global attention to both musical and environmental sound.

Oliveros embraced the infinite variety of sounds in our world. She viewed its sonic multiplicity as a "a grand composition" and was committed to developing and teaching perceptual skills that made it possible for both musicians and non-musicians to appreciate this global "sound environment." Her inclusive approach to listening parallels the work of John Cage, whose composition without sound 4'33" (1952) provides us with an opportunity, as Cage put it, "to listen, in an aesthetic way, to what there is to hear." Oliveros extended this commitment to all sound, including not only the sounds of external environments, but also the more ephemeral sounds of our innermost thoughts. She also replaced Cage's musical anarchism, which leaves sounds alone "to be themselves," with what she termed "Deep Listening," a form of meditative art embracing interactions between sounds, people, and the environments within which they

coexist. Deep Listening for Oliveros was a foundation for collaborative work that can cultivate an appreciation of human diversity. Pauline Oliveros believed that music was a humanitarian project to which she dedicated her life's work. She left the world not only with an extraordinary artistic legacy, but also with a sense of music's profound potential at a time in human history when it is most needed.

—David W. Bernstein, Professor of Music, Mills College, 2016

Scope and Contents:

The Pauline Oliveros collection documents the professional career of composer, accordionist and performer, Pauline Oliveros. The bulk of the collection consists of compositions and events programs from projects Oliveros completed after leaving the University of California, San Diego (1981) to become an independent composer and performer in Upstate New York. The most comprehensive series, Compositions, includes original scores ranging from 1969-2014. Materials include final compositions and supporting materials documenting Oliveros' process, including diagrams, sketches, notes, and correspondence. Notable compositions in the series include "Sonic Meditations," and "Deep Listening." Series 2, Events Programs, consists of a collection of program publicity, postcards, flyers and leaflets, and other materials documenting Oliveros' performances, music festivals, workshops, and other professional collaborations. This series also contains documents related to Oliveros' performances and collaborations at Mills College. The remainder of the collection comprises photographs of Oliveros, performances, and colleagues, correspondence, and various topical material including published articles about Oliveros, other projects, and course information about Mills College seminars taught by Oliveros.

Series 1: Compositions

Scope and Contents: Series comprises Oliveros composition files containing original and copies of scores; sketches and diagrams related to the process; some supporting notes and correspondence regarding the compositions. Series also includes photographs and scores from other composers.

Arrangement: Arranged alphabetically.

Series 2: Events Publicity and Programs

Scope and Contents: Includes programs, flyers, postcards, newspaper clippings, and publicity material documenting Oliveros' concerts, performances, recitals and workshops.

Arrangement: Arranged chronologically; additions to series added and arranged as received.

Series 3: Correspondence

Scope and Contents: Correspondence regarding performance and event planning, projects, publications; also includes correspondence from colleagues, individual performers, composers, artists, and friends.

Arrangement: Arranged alphabetically.

Series 4: Photographs

Scope and Contents: Comprises photographs of Oliveros' performances, other composers, colleagues and friends, and other related events.

Arrangement: Arranged alphabetically.

Series 5: Publications

Scope and Contents: Includes assorted writings, periodical articles, reviews, and anthology entries. Series divided into five subseries: Publications about Pauline Oliveros, other publications, projects, special interest, and miscellaneous printed material.

Arrangement: Further divided into two subseries:

Subseries 1: Publications about Pauline Oliveros

Scope and Contents: Includes published articles and reviews about Oliveros, and some publications written by Oliveros.

Arrangement: Arranged alphabetically by author, article, or publication title.

Subseries 2: Other publications

Scope and Contents: Includes works by others about electronic music, experimental music, and other areas of interest.

Arrangement: Arranged alphabetically by publication or article title.

Series 6: Projects

Scope and Contents: Documentation of other projects Oliveros founded or was involved with including information packets, flyers, and postcards.

Arrangement: Arranged alphabetically.

Series 7: Miscellany

Scope and Contents: Includes organizations, associations, memberships, and personal interest files; collected flyers; biographical materials, writings, grant proposals; and programs and postcards not directly related Oliveros' work.

Arrangement: Arranged alphabetically

Series 8: Mills College and other institutions

Scope and Contents: Consists of course materials, student rosters, and appointment offer from Mills College. Also includes miscellaneous materials from Wesleyan University and humanities course materials from the University of Texas.

Arrangement: Arranged as received.

Series 9: Oversize

Scope and Contents: Contains flat oversize items, including artwork, directional scores, periodicals, and posters.

Arrangement: Arranged as received.

Indexing terms:

Women in music.

Listening.

Sound -- Therapeutic use.

Improvisation (Music)

Music by women composers.

Electronic music.

Avant-garde (Music) -- United States.

Composers -- United States -- 20th century

Computer music

Meditation.