



Sharon Mabry

Music by Contemporary Women Composers Part III

Nancy Van de Vate was born in New Jersey, but has travelled extensively. She studied at the Eastman School of Music, Wellesley College, and Florida State University, where she received the Doctor of Music in Composition. In 1975 she founded the International League of Women Composers and has continued to be a leader in the establishment of women composers in the musical main-stream. Dr. Van de Vate has received several ASCAP Standard Awards and has won numerous prizes in composition competitions. She now resides in Vienna, Austria.

Van de Vate has written songs, song cycles, and chamber works suitable for a vocal recital. In 1976 she composed a very poignant work called *Letter to a Friend's Loneliness*, for soprano and string quartet. This eleven-minute work was commissioned by the Tennessee Music Teachers Association and sets portions of two poems by John Unterecker. The composer states that "the title *Letter to a Friend's Loneliness* reflects the poet's wish to convey sympathy to a bereaved friend. Finding conventional language inadequate, he translates his gesture of friendship into the more personal language of a poem. The images do not refer to his friend's loss but rather, to his own preoccupations at the time."

The work is in four short sections or "songs" called (1) I reach, (2) Today the fallen flowers, (3) Last night, and (4) The seas are calm. Van de Vate's use of the voice is quite traditional, allowing for beautiful legato lines and melodies which move chromatically a majority of the time, with large skips introduced for contrast. The string quartet never intrudes upon the voice. At times the voice is allowed to finish phrases unaccompanied. There is an effective and broad use of dynamics within a medium high vocal range. A lyric-mezzo or lyric soprano could easily perform this work. The voice must be capable of *pp* in the upper range, while having an excellent sense of pitch. Though there is some dissonance in this work, it is complimentary to the languid vocal line which moves above and weaves through the intricate texture of the four strings. Contact the American Music Center, (212) 366-5263, for more information about Nancy Van de Vate. They can also give you a listing of her works for voice.

Another American women composer who contributed substantially to the song repertoire was Mary Howe. Mary Howe (1882-1964) was born in Richmond, Virginia. She studied piano and composition at the Peabody Conservatory and then became a student of Nadia Boulanger in Paris. Her compositions include piano, orchestral, chamber, vocal, choral, and ballet works. Her works have been per-

formed by major symphony orchestras and other major performing groups and soloists. In 1961 she received an honorary doctorate from George Washington University.

The Galaxy Music Corporation has published seven collections of her songs for various voice types. They are: (1) *Seven Goethe Songs*; (2) *English Songs* (part one); (3) *Baritone Songs* (settings of poems by Yeats, Shaw, Lee, Frost, Norman, Lynch, and Gordon); (4) *French Songs*; (5) *German Songs* (including a four-song cycle to poems of Rainer Maria Rilke); (6) *English Songs* (part two); and (7) *English Songs* (part three). All of these publications come in high and medium keys except volume three.

Mary Howe's musical language is that of the late nineteenth-century German influence. She was a master of emotional expression and beauty of melody. The musical texture is always sensitive to the text. At times the voice and piano show great impulsiveness in response to the poetry. There is an expansiveness in Howe's music which allows comparison with Brahms and Strauss. The piano writing is always interesting and is an intricate part of Howe's sensitivity to text expression. Harmonically, she is a traditionalist, but uses the traditional idiom in a very independent way, allowing for stimulating variety and creativity among the many available songs. This music has tremendous vitality and is well worth exploring.