



Sharon Mabry

Music by Contemporary Women Composers Part IV

One of the readers of this column wrote recently to ask for information concerning music with humor which might be included on a recital program. Some singers stay away from music of this type for fear that the audience will not respond well to it. Since in recent years vocal recitals have become, as one reader put it, "more of the same," it is worth the effort to try and create variety within this format.

One composer who has excelled in this venue is Elizabeth Vercoe. She has written two pieces which are certain to get the desired audience response. In 1981, Vercoe wrote a delightful short song cycle, *Irreveries from Sappho*, which has had numerous performances. *Irreveries* is wickedly satiric and full of musical jokes and parodies. The composer comments: "Although Sappho's poetry is over 2500 years old, it seems remarkably up-to-date. Its wit calls for whatever musical sleight of hand a composer might muster: thus, the use of popular idioms and hidden tunes ('Turkey in the Straw,' 'Auld Lang Syne'), as well as the more respectable tricks of the trade, such as counterpoint and recitative. Sappho's three women have clearly distinctive voices, but all three bespeak of a fierce pride." The individual songs are *Andromeda Rag*, *Older Woman Blues*, and *Boogie for Leda*. All of the songs have pianistic qualities characteristic of their titles and require an excellent pianist with a sense of these styles. The vocal line is mostly traditional, with a few *Sprechstimme* tones or *glissandi* in-

terspersed among a rather conversational melodic line. These pieces are fun to sing and allow for great variety of interpretation. The individual singer's personality will determine the amount of liberty taken with the portrait of each woman's character. Sopranos or mezzos could easily perform this cycle. It is published by Arsis Press, Washington, D.C.

Vercoe has also written a more experimental piece for voice and tape called *Nine Epigrams From Poor Richard*. Composed in 1986, this song cycle of approximately eight minutes can be done by a man or woman. The composer states that the songs may be transposed down if sung by a man. The *Nine Epigrams* is unique in a number of ways. The singer must make his or her own tape prior to the performance. This tape is then played while the singer performs the vocal line live. Vercoe has given clear, concise directions concerning the preparation of the tape for each of the pieces. No special equipment is required for the production of the tape. Merely a recording system with two microphones and stereophonic capabilities is needed. All but one song use the tape accompaniment. The song titles are "Composers," "Truth," "Who Lies," "Secrets," "Wedlock," "Sally Laughs," "Glib-Tongue," "People," and "Politics." The texts taken from *Poor Richard's Almanac* are printed below.

He that composes himself is wiser than he that composes music.

Truth is bitter but a lie is savoury at times.

Who lies down with dogs rises up with fleas.

Three can keep a secret if two are dead.

Wedlock, as old men note, hath likened been

Unto a public crowd or common rout;
Where those that are without would fain get in,

And those that are within would fain get out.

Sally laughs at everything you say,
Why? Because she has fine teeth.

Here comes Glib-Tongue who can out-flatter a dedication and lie like ten epitaphs.

People wrapped up in themselves make small packages.

Happy the nation, fortunate the age,
whose history is not diverting.

This is a hilariously funny work with wildly expressive, unusual vocal sounds, such as a repertoire of laughs, whispering, slowly changing vowel sounds, bat sounds, glottal clicks, inhaling and exhaling into a microphone, whistles, exaggerated speech, staccatos, panting, and even coughing. If the work is done by a male, the section called *Sally Laughs* should be done in falsetto. This work is available from the composer at 381 Garfield Road, Concord, MA 01742.

Conducting position:

The Virginia Glee Club
at the University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia

Masters Degree recommended
Salary range: \$6000 to \$8000
per year

Please send a cover letter and
resume to:

Director Search Committee
Virginia Glee Club
112 Old Cabell Hall
Charlottesville, VA 22903

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