



Sharon Mabry

### FINDING MUSIC BY WOMEN COMPOSERS

Recent *New Directions* columns have included information about works by several women composers. Some readers have expressed an interest either in establishing festivals of music by women or in finding avenues of communication with and information about contemporary women composers. This article is designed to aid in the search for knowledge concerning this vast repertoire.

Women have composed music for generations but have not always been recognized for their efforts. Though they are receiving more commissions than ever before and winning more prestigious prizes (Shulamit Ran, 1991 Pulitzer Prize, and Joan Tower, 1990 Grawemeyer Award) many feel that their music is still not seriously considered by performing musicians and thus by the listening audiences. There seems to be a gap between these composers and possible performers of their music. This may be largely due to a lack of

research time on the part of the performer, a difficulty in finding scores, and a lack of familiarity with music by women in general. Until recently, it has been difficult, if not impossible, to find women listed in reference books on music, or to find a bibliography of works by individuals. It is still rare to find women composers attached to university music faculties. Therefore, performers may not be able to locate a woman who composes music within their immediate geographical area. Research and networking will be necessary in order to find a variety of works suitable to the performer's needs.

Where should you begin? A logical source is the *International League of Women Composers*, Abilene Christian University, ACU Box 8274, Abilene, TX 79699. This organization was founded in 1975 by Nancy Van de Vate, and lists more than two hundred composer members representing twenty-two countries. They publish a quarterly *Journal*, which contains articles about composers; information about festivals, and premieres; and gives resource information on the subject of women composers. It is possible to place an ad or a call for scores in the *ILWC Journal*, a certain way to let the composer readers know of the performer's musical needs. This *Journal* also lists new publications of scores, recordings, and books on music by women. A few other sources currently available on this subject are:

*Contemporary Concert Music by Women, a Directory of the Composers and Their Works* (published by Greenwood Press)

*Women Composers, Conductors, and Musicians of the Twentieth*

*Century, Selected Biographies* (published by Scarecrow Press, Inc.)

*Women and Music 1989/1990: a selective bibliography on the collective subject of women in music* (compiled by Margaret Ericson, Ithaca College Library Audio Center, Ithaca, NY 14850) \$4.00

*An Abstract: A Reference Guide to Researching the Music of Women Composers* by Selma Epstein, 2443 Pickwick Rd., Dickeyville, MD 21207.

*Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* by Susan McClary (published by University of Minnesota Press)

*Historical Anthology of Music by Women* by James Briscoe (published by Indiana University Press)

*The Musical Woman: An International Perspective* Vol. III, 1986-1990 (published by Greenwood Press)

In addition to the books mentioned above, the *New Grove Dictionary of Women Composers* is being compiled now and will be published in 1992. One publishing company which specializes in music by women composers is Arsis Press. Catalogues are available from Clara Lyle Boone, publisher, 1719 Bay Street, Southeast, Washington, DC 20003. It is also possible to receive a listing of scores by women available at the American Music Center in New York City. Contact them at (212) 366-5263.

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