

# MUSIC, SHE WROTE: A MINI-SERIES ON COMPOSITIONS BY WOMEN

## Part One: Organ Music

by Frances Nobert

**Introduction:** Although there are many fine compositions in print, it seems that organ music by women is rarely heard in liturgical or concert settings. This mini-series is intended to provide information and to encourage organists to explore this body of literature. It has been my experience that congregations and audiences have been surprised, intrigued and enthusiastic after hearing preludes, interludes, postludes and concert pieces composed by women.

### Volumes

The following volumes are readily available and contain works which may be used either in church or in concert. These twentieth-century compositions are accessible both to the performer and to the listener.

*The Roberta Bitgood Organ Album*, arr. Roberta Bitgood, pub. H. W. Gray Publications, 1991. The collection has six compositions, among which is a Baroque-like setting of “God Himself is With Us.” This chorale prelude may be used effectively before weddings or church services. Also in the volume is “On an Ancient Alleluia,” based on a melody found in a store near Notre Dame in Paris. The composition, which begins quietly and moves into a full-blown toccata, may either be combined with the chorale prelude or played as a single piece before a church service. It is also a fine concert work.

*Seasonal Psalms for Organ, Volumes I and II*, by Emma Lou Diemer, The Sacred Music Press, 70/1258 S and 70/1259 S, 1999. Foreword: “The two volumes of *Seasonal Psalms for Organ* contain original compositions that are free interpretations of Psalm verses. The Psalms were chosen from the lectionary for the major festival days and seasons of the Church Year. Some of the settings are based on hymns and chorales that are commonly associated with those days. The organ registrations serve as guidelines, and they should be creatively changed to suit differing instruments. There are instances where synthesized MIDI sounds can be effectively employed.”

*Twelve Choral Preludes on Gregorian Chant Themes for Organ* by Jeanne Demessieux, Summy-Birchard Music, exclusively distributed by Warner Bros. Publications, 15800 N. W. 48th Avenue, Miami, FL 33014, ISBN 0-87487-603-6, 1995. This collection has been referred to as the Catholic version of the organ booklet of our century. The mostly two- or three-page compositions are appropriate for preludes, postludes or communion music. The longest work, variations on “O Filii,” would also be effective in concert. For Christmas one might learn “Adeste Fideles,” a charming setting in the style of a musette. With a pedal tone almost entirely throughout, this arrangement could be practiced on the piano.

*Margaret Vardell Sandresky: Organ Music, Volumes I and II: Solo Organ*, ed. Virginia L. Haisten, pub. Wayne Leupold Editions, 1994. The first volume contains one of Sandresky’s best-known works, *L’homme armé Organ Mass* of six movements. Each section is short, with the longest being the “Credo” of 4:30 minutes. Therefore, selected movements or the entire work may be used as a prelude or in concert. The “Gloria” works well as a postlude. Also in *Volume I* are several chorale preludes, Toccata on “Veni Creator Spiritus,” “Wedding March” and “Jubilate Deo.” “Wedding March” is excellent for an academic procession, a bridal party entry or a postlude.

*Laudate! Volume 4*, ed. James W. Kosnik, pub. Concordia Publishing House, 1997. Of the thirty-nine settings in this volume, fourteen are by Emma Lou Diemer, Mary Beth Bennett and Janet Linker. The preludes, interludes and postludes are based on some of the most popular hymnody found in both *Worship III* and in *Gather*, two Catholic hymnals. James Kosnik states in his foreword that his “...hope is that this series of organ pieces written by gifted composers will assist the parish organist in selecting

organ music which will encourage people to pick up their hymnals and unite their voices in sacred congregational song.”

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