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## New Wine into Old Bottles: Traditional Media and Contemporary Women Composers

Sharon S. Prado

Traditional genres continue to attract contemporary women composers. Ellen Taaffe Zwilich. Joan Tower. Katherine Hoover and Nancy Van de Vate are among those women writing string quartets, symphonies, concertos and chamber music. Though these women and others choose conventional forms and performing forces, their music is fresh and their expression uncontained by formulaic approaches. Focusing upon specific pieces by Zwilich. Tower, and Hoover, this article explores both what is old and new about their music, highlighting those ties to the past which are infused with new performer-friendly and accessible ideas. Included is a survey of women whose primary contributions fall within traditionalist boundaries — a categorization no longer readily defined....

### Katherine Hoover

Katherine Hoover is yet another contemporary composer to revisit forms and genres from centuries past. In the case of her *Medieval Suite* (1986), she not only returns to a design uniting brief, contrasting movements, but she creates a musical characterization of an era, with allusions to medieval pieces: a Machaut virelai, the plainchant *Kyrie Alme Pater*, and the Reading Rota, "Sumer is icumen in."<sup>1</sup> The last movement, "Demon's Dance," even connects the work to the dance origins of the traditional suite. Hoover also continues the nineteenth-century practice of both literary extra-musical inspiration - in this case, Barbara Tuchman's history of fourteenth-century France, *A Distant Mirror* - and the instrumental characterization of people and events - "The Black Knight" (II), "The Drunken Friar" (III), and "On the Betrothal of Princess Isabelle of France, Aged Six Years" (IV). Her quotation of Machaut's virelai "Dame, vostre doula viaire debonaire" in the opening instrumental "Virelai" and her use of devices like parallel motion and open fifths to suggest antiquity fit her philosophy that in order for art music to survive, it

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<sup>1</sup> *Medieval Suite*, winner of the National Flute Association's Newly Published Music Competition, is available in two versions, the first for flute and piano, the second for flute and orchestra. Both versions are recorded. the former on a German compact disk Det Ferne Sptegel: *Music by Woman Composers for Flute and Piano* (Bayer Records 100246), and the latter on Leonarda LEI 121. The flute/ piano score is published by Theodore Presser (1986). An excerpt from this piece was nationally broadcast during a PBS special. "The Artist Was a Woman".

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must incorporate sounds from other kinds of music (or eras), including contemporary popular musics. She believes that preconceptions about art music have negatively affected the reception of contemporary music, and that performers and composers, in order to survive, are beginning to incorporate popular elements into their concerts and compositions (Grimes, 1986-87). In more recent compositions Hoover has successfully achieved such a blend. She describes her Clarinet Concerto (1987), written for jazz virtuoso Eddie Daniels. as a piece "in a familiar format of three movements, with numerous elements of jazz and bigband. this particular piece incorporates a multi-media dimension with the inclusion of poetry and slides...

...If Old containers can get the wine sold, then why not put new wine into old containers? Katherine Hoover has acknowledged that composers of either sex often choose conventional generic designations to attract performers to contemporary works that they would otherwise ignore. This survey of selected compositions by successful women demonstrates that though conventional in designation, these works are not constrained, nor are their creators in any way limited in what they pour of themselves and their abilities to communicate and express into their music.

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