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## The Music of Nancy Van De Vate, March 26, 1998

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Music Department  
Illinois State University



THE MUSIC OF  
NANCY VAN DE VATE

The one-hundredth program of the 1997-98 season

Kemp Recital Hall  
Thursday Evening  
March 26, 1998  
7:00 pm

**PROGRAM**

**The Earth Is so Lovely**  
Alison Trego, *Mezzo-Soprano*

from *Four Somber Songs*

**Alone**  
Megan Poulos, *Mezzo-Soprano*  
Paul Borg, *Piano*

**Twelve Pieces for Piano on One to Twelve Notes**

III—E,F,Gb  
V—B,C,E,F#, G  
VI—A,Bb,Db, D,E,F,Gb  
VII—B,C#, D#, E,F#, G, A#  
IX—All pitches except B,C and D  
XII—All 12 pitches  
Seung Hye Lee, *Piano*

**Cocaine Lil**  
Michelle Vought, *Soprano*

*Jazz singers*  
Samantha Hammer  
Julie Fallon  
Anne Decker  
David Vish

**INTERMISSION**

**Youthful Age**  
David Vish, *Tenor*  
Seung-Hye Lee, *Piano*

**Cradle Song**  
Leslie Pomykala, *Soprano*  
Lynda Barnes, *Piano*

**String Trio**  
First movement  
Third movement

*Faculty String Trio*  
Sarah Gentry, *Violin*  
Kate Hamilton, *Viola*  
Greg Hamilton, *Cello*

from *Nemo: Jenseits von Vulkania*

**Chess Match Duet**  
William McDonald, *Tenor*  
John Koch, *Baritone*  
Paul Borg, *Piano*

## PROGRAM NOTES

*The Earth Is So Lovely* was composed in Oxford, Mississippi in 1962. The text is by Heinrich Heine, translated from the German by Howard E. Hugo.

*Alone*, taken from a set entitled Four Somber Songs, was written in 1970 to a text by Edgar Allan Poe.

*Twelve Pieces for Piano on One to Twelve Notes* was begun in Jakarta, Indonesia in 1985 and completed in Vienna in late autumn, 1986. The world premiere of the entire set on July 19, 1990 was presented by Ruth Spindler. The Twelve Pieces constituted the opening work on two of several concerts in Vienna in 1990 and 1991 devoted entirely to Van de Vate's solo and chamber music.

Material for the Twelve Pieces was first intended for a second volume of the composer's Nine Preludes for Piano, completed in 1984. Meant to be similar in character and style to the Nine Preludes, each piece was planned from the outset to use a certain number of pitches. As the set evolved, however, the number of pieces expanded to eleven. After some initial doubt about composing a work using only one pitch class, Van de Vate wrote the present short toccata on C. The set then included all Twelve Pieces.

The composer found it easier to construct those works with relatively fewer pitches; as a dedicated craftsman, she finds some constraints musically stimulating. The limited availability of pitch resources required greater contrast of texture, timbre, keyboard technique, tempo, dynamics, rhythm—all the elements of music other than pitch—to create the drama necessary for an extended and somewhat abstract work.

The character of individual pieces seemed to grow naturally out of the number of pitches used. For example, the fifth piece uses a pentatonic scale; the twelfth, a twelve-tone row. In the sixth, the right hand plays only on black keys and the left only on white, both hands using almost exclusively triads and their inversions. In the ninth piece, the right hand

again plays only on black keys and the left on white, but rather than the toccata-like texture and motion of the sixth, this piece creates a shimmering sound not unlike that of an Indonesian gamelan. Its unique timbre is enhanced by holding down both damper and sostenuto or una corda pedals throughout.

This performance of *Cocaine Lil* represents its second performance in America. *Cocaine Lil* has been performed throughout Western Europe by the Belcanto Ensemble of Stuttgart and in 1990 was produced, in Polish translation, by Polish Television for telecast throughout Poland. It is a short one-act music theater work for mezzo-soprano and quartet of acting singers. The text is an anonymous American folk poem from the early part of the 20th Century. The use of cocaine, legal at that time, gave rise to a drug culture peopled by characters like those in the poem—Hophead Mag, Dopey Slim, the Poppy Face Kid and Hasheesh Nell.

Composed in a satiric, ironic idiom, the work contains some simple diatonic melodies appropriate to the folk character of the text. Much of the poem's imagery is expressed in a slang peculiar to drug usage: "snow," "sleighriding," "climbing up snow ladders," etc. The drug's hallucinatory effects are expressed musically in passages using a variety of extended vocal techniques, especially in the solo part. The vocal quartet has many aleatory passages, improvised in a style suited to the vernacular character of the work. Action and music in *Cocaine Lil* are often as bizarre and grotesque as the people in the poem and the life they lived.

*Youthful Age* was also composed in 1962 and employs an anonymous Greek, 6th century B.C. text.

*Cradle Song* was composed in 1962 in Oxford, Mississippi to a text by Clemens Brentano, translated from the German by Herman Salinger. It uses the same type of generally conservative harmonic vocabulary as Van de Vate's other songs from this period. The accompaniment is gently contrapuntal, yet still supports the voice.

*Nemo: Jenseits von Vulkania* is one of two full-scale operatic compositions by Nancy Van de Vate. On the title page, Van de Vate calls the opera "eine romantische Marchenoper in vier Akten," which translates "a romantic fairy tale opera in four acts." She derived inspiration for the work from Jules Verne's fantastic adventure novel *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. The opera's setting is c. 1900 in the South Seas where the Commander Nemo, son of the builder of Jules Verne's ship the Nautilus, has continued his father's scientific work.

The story's main plot centers around the beautiful Elena who has been kidnapped by the evil dictator Dannoso. He plans to marry her even though she and Nemo are deeply in love with each other. Throughout the opera, Nemo bemoans the fact that he has dedicated his life to the continuation of his father's research and is therefore unable to entertain the idea of a conjugal relationship with Elena.

This duet occurs at the point where Nemo's boyhood friend Franz informs him of Dannoso's abduction of Elena. Nemo at first refuses to assist in her rescue. But then, he and Franz discuss a game of chess, abandoned years before when Franz left Vulkania and went back to the world above. Even after all this time they both still recall the placement of the figures on the chessboard. They decide to continue the match, the chess figures are set in place, and Franz and Nemo play the game to its conclusion. The checkmate of the black king by the white queen becomes symbolic for the freeing of Elena. Nemo realizes he must return with Franz to the world above to rescue her, forsaking his undersea life in a world of men for the love of a beautiful woman.

## BIOGRAPHY

*Nancy Van de Vate* was born in Plainfield, New Jersey and now lives in Vienna, Austria. Her music has appeared often on major international music festivals. She gives frequent guest lectures about her music in German and English in Austria, Germany, Poland and the United States. She has composed more than 115 works in virtually all forms—from a composition for solo instrument on only one note to grand opera.

Van de Vate is one of the most recorded composers of orchestral music in the world. She has received commissions and awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Maryland State Arts Council, the American Association of University Women, Meet the Composer, the Money for Women Fund and others. She has been a Resident Fellow at Yaddo, the MacDowell Colony and Ossabaw Island in the US and the Tyrone Guthrie Centre at Annaghmakerrig, Ireland, the Brahmshaus (Baden-Baden, Germany) and the Kuenstlerhaus Boswil, Switzerland.

Van de Vate attended the Eastman School of Music and completed her undergraduate education at Wellesley College. She received the Master of Music degree in Music Composition from the University of Mississippi and the Doctor of Music degree in Composition from Florida State University. She did post-doctoral work in electronic music at Dartmouth College and the University of New Hampshire in the summer of 1972.

For many years her musical activities included teaching at nine universities in the southern United States and Hawaii, performing as violist in symphony orchestras, performing as a solo and chamber pianist, and serving as president of two composers' organizations, as well as actively composing. She has contributed articles to *Musical America*, the *International Musician*, *The Instrumentalist*, *Symphony News*, and numerous other professional periodicals in the United States and abroad.

Since 1990, Van de Vate has served as vice president and artistic director of Vienna Modern Masters, a nonprofit recording company devoted primarily to producing compact discs of contemporary classical music for orchestra and orchestra with chorus. Most of her music is available on VMM compact discs which are distributed in the United States. A selected bibliography and works list are available upon request from VMM, Margaretenstrasse 125/15, A-1050, Vienna, Austria.

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WILL FOLLOW TONIGHT'S CONCERT  
IN THE FOYER OF KEMP RECITAL HALL.



A VERY SPECIAL THANK YOU TO WOMEN'S STUDIES,  
THE FINE ARTS DEPARTMENT, AND THE MUSIC DEPARTMENT  
FOR ASSISTANCE IN SPONSERING  
DR. NANCY VAN DE VATE.