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## Mother Mallard: Moogs, Minimalism, and Cage

Mother Mallard's Portable Masterpiece Company, 1974-1976  
Cuneiform Records CD Rune 147 ([www.cuneiformrecords.com](http://www.cuneiformrecords.com))

In the face of massive consolidation by the record industry, it's nice to see some labels continuing to be bold: releasing prolifically and remaining daring in their selections of artists to champion. Maryland's Cuneiform Records is a wonderfully eclectic imprint that puts out jazz, prog, electronic, and experimental music of a variety of stripes both new and old. A recent treasure is their reissue of music by 70s synthesizer ensemble Mother Mallard.

Composer/performers David Borden and Steve Drews, joined by keyboardist Judy Borsher, used then-new analog synth technology to craft soundscapes that combined downtown experimentalism and minimalism.

"C-A-G-E Part II" was inspired by the group's one-time collaboration with the Merce Cunningham Company in 1972. Enthused by performing a Cage work at the event, Borden created this motoric, oscillating piece, based on the letters of Cage's name, as a sixtieth birthday tribute to the composer. It resembles the hypnotic character of some of Cage's piano music – especially *In a Landscape*. "Downtown" certainly lives up to its title, recalling the early music of Philip Glass in its slow-moving harmonic rhythm and starkly limited pitch and gestural vocabulary. While still obsessed with ostinati, "Oleo Strut" is a bit more ambient in demeanor. Mother Mallard explores the potentialities of their equipment here, crafting a variety of beguiling textures with a formidable array of analog keyboards. Despite all the progress made in digital media, some of the sounds made by "vintage" synths – now period instruments – were wonderful and remain inimitable. Portable Masterpiece Company is a great trip down memory lane.

Posted by: [Christian Carey](#) August 11th, 2008 under [Uncategorized](#).

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### Christian Carey



Christian Carey is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Music Composition, History, and Theory at Westminster Choir College of Rider University. Degrees: Juilliard School (B.Mus. in Voice), Boston University (M.M. in Composition), and Rutgers University (Ph.D. in Composition and Theory); his teachers included Charles Wuorinen and Lukas Foss. He is active as a composer, performer, and music theorist.

Dr. Carey's research focuses on contemporary American music; his dissertation discussed Elliott Carter's Fifth String Quartet. He has written about Babbitt, Wuorinen, Rakowski, and Feldman, and is currently at work on an article about the late works of Ralph Shapey for *Contemporary Music Review*. His articles and reviews have been published in *Signal to Noise*, *Muso*, *Musicworks*, *Sequenza 21*, *Copper Press*, *All About Jazz*, *Pop Matters*, and several other publications.

His compositions have been

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performed by the New York New Music Ensemble, the Cassatt String Quartet, the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble, Ionisation, and the Helix New Music Ensemble, at Lincoln Center, the June in Buffalo Festival, the Music Academy of the West, the Aspen Music Festival, Two River Theater Company, the Montclair Art Museum, the Progressions Series in Baltimore, Maryland, and Music '99 at the University of Cincinnati. Mourning Madrid, a work for orchestra and live locomotive, was commissioned by the Music Festival of the Hamptons and performed in July, 2004 by the Atlantic Chamber Orchestra and the Long Island Railroad in Bridgehampton, New York.

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