

Bio information: **MOTHER MALLARD'S PORTABLE MASTERPIECE CO.**  
Title: "**LIKE A DUCK TO WATER**" (Cuneiform Rune 147)

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#### **FILE UNDER: ELECTRONIC/ROCK**

Based in Ithaca, NY, Mother Mallard's Portable Masterpiece Co. began doing live performances of music composed for synthesizers in 1969. Formed by composer and keyboardist David Borden "to present very new and startling work", it initially presented pieces by Robert Ashley and others but soon focused on original works. Working closely with Robert Moog, MMPMC became an all-synthesizer ensemble devoted to new music, most likely the world's first, and one of the very first performing synthesizer ensembles. Said Borden: "it seemed to me that the synthesizer could fit in with Bucky Fuller's idea of 'doing more with less': that three people with Moogs could make a lot more noise than three string players!"

Borden, a native of Brookline, MA, began working with Moog in 1967. A Fulbright scholar with degrees from Eastman School of Music and Harvard, Borden moved to Ithaca on a Ford Foundation Composer-in-Residence grant; Moog's company was in nearby Trumansburg. Moog taught Borden how to use his new invention, the voltage controlled electronic synthesizer, gave Borden round-the-clock access to his shop, and was supportive of MMPMC, lending it equipment and recommending it for concerts. Until late 1971, when Moog sold his company and moved to Buffalo, MMPMC used Moog's factory for rehearsals, premiering early pieces down the street at the Kosmos Restaurant.

MMPMC's performance of "Easter," at Cornell's Sage Chapel on Easter Sunday, 1970, marked the world premiere of this piece as well as the first-ever live performance using a MiniMoog – the band had Moog's prototype. At a subsequent concert at NYC's Trinity Church – the MiniMoog's NY premiere, months before its "official" debut by Dick Hyman – the band found it "hadn't been billed as Mother Mallard or David Borden but as THE MOOG SYNTHESIZER. This kind of billing would dominate our performances for the first few years, because no one else was performing with Moog Synthesizers except for Walter Carlos and Richard Teitelbaum." MMPMC's numerous live performances throughout the 1970s included concerts at Cornell University (Barnes Hall and the Johnson Museum of Art); various New York City venues (The Kitchen, Paula Cooper Gallery, Public Access Synthesizer Studio/PASS, the Dance Theater Workshop, etc), and colleges and universities in the northeast.

Mother Mallard's first Moog-based lineup, consisting of Borden, Steve Drews and Linda Fisher was featured on the band's LP, *MMPMC*, self-released on the Earthquack label in 1974. It featured compositions by both Borden and Drews, equally responsible for the band's early sound. As Borden recalls: "Steve found very exotic and beautiful sounds on the Moogs, and was a master performer on the ribbon controller. My stuff kept to more simple sounds with the emphasis on multi-metered contrapuntal figures that repeated at different lengths." When Cuneiform reissued this LP on CD, *MMPMC 1970-73* [Rune 109] in 1999, critics world-wide claimed it was an essential work, praising both its technological and stylistic innovations. *The New York Press* described it as "eye-opening in terms of innovation, providing the missing links between several disjunctive musical styles." And *Magnet* remarked: "Most of the early attempts to make serious music with synthesizers came off like a child learning how to ride a bike; awkward and uncoordinated, generally resulting in a painful experience for all involved. In contrast, the pioneering efforts of MMPMC stand as a monument to the gimmick-less magnificence that can be achieved with a pure application of this technology".

Some key figures of the 70's recognized MMPMC's skill at the time. Borden recalls that: "director Billy Friedkin had heard some re-broadcasts of our WBAI Free Music Store concerts and was interested in having me compose music for his new horror film. We were all invited to the cast party of the EXORCIST at the end of the shooting, and Billy introduced us around to everyone as the people who were doing the soundtrack." Ultimately, Friedkin used Borden's music in only two scenes of *The Exorcist* (which was recently reissued); when Father Merrin is looking up at the house, about to enter; and when Father Karras scurries down the stone stairs, followed by a montage leading to Regen's bedroom door.

Late in 1974, Linda Fisher left the band. Judy Borsher, a long-time associate of MMPMC who had helped start Earthquack, joined the band in 1975. In 1976, the line-up of Borsher, Borden and Drews recorded *Like A Duck to Water*. MMPMC's second studio recording released on Earthquack. The LP featured two pieces by Drews, "Oleo Strut" and "Waterwheel", and Borden's "C-A-G-E Part II", part of a series based on the chords C, A, G and E, composed for John Cage..

This CD reissue of *Like A Duck To Water* contains the entirety of MMPMC's second album as well as an additional 20' of previously unreleased contemporary material. It also contains a short Quicktime movie of the band performing live in 1976, an excerpt from Edin Vález's video "Mother Mallard's Portable Masterpiece Company", shot by Vito Brunetti and featuring Drews' "Waterwheel" as a soundtrack. This CD is an essential acquisition for those interested in MMPMC, David Borden's later works (especially the *Continuing Story of Counterpoint* series), minimalism, and early synthesizer music. This album provides a uniquely American slant on synthesizer music by a band whose pioneering contributions to the genre had been forgotten until now.