



Bio information: **MOTHER MALLARD'S PORTABLE MASTERPIECE CO. / DAVID BORDEN**

Title: **MAKE WAY FOR MOTHER MALLARD : 50 YEARS OF MUSIC** (Cuneiform Rune 513/514)

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www.cuneiformrecords.com

FILE UNDER: **ELECTRONIC / CONTEMPORARY CLASSICAL / MINIMALISM**

**MOTHER MALLARD'S PORTABLE MASTERPIECE CO.**  
– the World's First All Synthesizer Ensemble –  
**Wraps up 50 Years of Performing Works by its Founder,**  
**the Composer, Keyboardist & Electronic Music Pioneer**  
**DAVID BORDEN,**  
**with a Two-Disc Set Spotighting Recordings made in**  
**the Ensemble's Early and Recent Years**

In a groundbreaking career spanning more than half a century, American composer and musician **David Borden** helped pave the way for electronic music – via both analogue synthesizers and digital instruments – to be integrated into New Music/ Creative/ Classical composition and live performance. In 1969, he founded the world's first synthesizer ensemble – **Mother Mallard's Portable Masterpiece Co.** – in **Bob Moog's** Trumansburg studio, working with Moog's prototypes and analogue equipment, and he later founded (1987) and headed **Cornell University's Digital Music Department**, inspiring new generations with digital music via **Apple** desktop and laptop computers. Simultaneous with his work at Cornell, Borden was a prolific composer, creating countless classical, experimental and 'beyond genre' works often performed with his ensemble. His work includes one of the most important documents of American classical minimalism: *The Continuing Story of Counterpoint*, a 12-part cycle that Cuneiform Records released on three CDs between 1989-1991. This 2-disc Cuneiform Records release, *Make Way for Mother Mallard: 50 Years of Music*, features one disc of early (1970s) and one disc of recent (2019) Mother Mallard performances of several key Borden pieces.



**STEVE FEIGENBAUM, CUNEIFORM'S HEAD, REMINISCES ON WORKING WITH DAVID BORDEN  
AND HIS ENSEMBLE, MOTHER MALLARD'S PORTABLE MASTERPIECE CO.:**

"**David Borden** and Cuneiform's relationship go back to even before Cuneiform, as I was a partner in a short-lived record label called **Atmosphere** that was meant to focus on electronic music and managed to put out two releases (**Darren Kearns** and **The Nightcrawlers**) before calling it a day. If my long-term memory serves me correctly, **David Borden's** *Anatidae* was scheduled as Atmosphere's third release, but when that label folded and as I had recently established Cuneiform on my own, it became Cuneiform's fourth release, coming out on vinyl in 1985.

**David Borden** is a woefully under-valued pioneer of electronic music and a marvelous composer. We've been proud to work with him on numerous projects, including releasing his minimalist masterwork, *The Continuing Story of Counterpoint*, in Cuneiform's early years. Besides Borden's pioneering work in **Bob Moog's Trumansburg** studio, his establishing the world's first synthesizer ensemble, and his hugely important recordings, compositions and performances, Borden's remarkable accomplishments include founding and heading **Cornell University's Digital Music Program**. He's had a hugely active career and I'm personally thrilled to be able to work with Dave again on a release for **Cuneiform Records' 40th year!**"

– **Steve Feigenbaum, 2024**

**MUSICIAN DAVID BORDEN REMINISCES ABOUT 50 YEARS OF MUSIC WITH HIS MOTHER  
MALLARD PORTABLE MASTERPIECE CO. ENSEMBLES**

“I founded **Mother Mallard’s Portable Masterpiece Co.** in the spring of 1969. I was Composer-Pianist for Dance at **Cornell University** but I had also been working nights for two years at the **Moog Company in Trumansburg** trying to understand the synthesizer for making music and possibly to use in live performance. At first I used **Mother Mallard** to perform new music at Cornell because no one else was doing it. **Steve Drews** was the first member of my band. He was a graduate student at Cornell earning a DMA in music composition. I had already introduced him to the modular **Moog Synthesizer**. He took to it very quickly, whereas I had taken a long time to master it. Shortly he quit his degree program and concentrated on making music with this new electronic instrument. I was 30 and he was 23.

Our first few concerts involved asking other musicians to help and gathering amplification and sound system gear, which was new at the time for classical music. Some of the composers we presented on these early concerts were **Robert Ashley, Morton Feldman, Daniel Lentz, Jon Hassell, Terry Riley, John Cage, Philip Glass, Steve Reich** and others. By 1970 Steve and I started performing with synthesizers while the **MiniMoog** was being invented. **Bob Moog** was an early supporter of the band and made sure we had the synthesizers we needed. We used the **Model A Mini** as well as a few portable modular models. It soon became obvious that we needed another keyboardist because all of the Moogs were monophonic (one could not play more than one note at a time, like a wind instrument.) We soon found **Linda Fisher**, a 21-year-old keyboardist with the **Creative Act**, an Ithaca rock group that composed much of its own music. Intrigued by the synthesizers, she decided to join our ensemble. She also brought her RMI Electra Piano with her, which was our only polyphonic instrument. Mother Mallard became a synthesizer ensemble playing our own compositions.

Although Bob’s synthesizers became very well known in 1968 due to **Wendy Carlos’s LP Switched On Bach**, and were also soon used by **The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, and Emerson, Lake and Palmer**, they were very expensive. Soon the MiniMoog started to make money for the company but too late to make as much money that was needed to keep the company afloat. So in the fall of 1971, Bob chose to sell his company to an entrepreneur rather than declare bankruptcy so that he could keep giving his customers technical support. Bob remained as the company’s inventor but he had to move to **Buffalo, NY**. It was at this time that Mother Mallard had to buy the synthesizers we used or give up the band. So the three of us invested in three **modular Moogs**, the **MiniMoog A** and a **MiniMoog D**. These, along with the **RMI Electra Piano**, gave us an instrument for each hand. The band was officially born after being together for three years.

This Moog Synthesizer band lasted until the summer of 1978 when we all decided it was time to move on. But during its first nine years, **Mother Mallard** gave many concerts and was managed by **Performing Artservices**. In 1975 Linda Fisher left the group to join **David Tudor** and the **Composers Inside Electronics** group in New York City. She was replaced by **Judy Borsher**, a 22-year-old Cornell graduate who had already helped us release our first LP. In 1976 Steve Drews decided he wanted to be a photographer instead of a musician, so he was replaced by **Chip Smith**. Chip also brought his Fender Rhodes keyboard with him. This last ensemble of Chip, Judy and me was probably the best performance group of all.

After 1978 I gave a few concerts with **Edmund Niemann** and **Nurit Tilles**, also known as **Double Edge**, a piano duo. They were also members of **Steve Reich’s** ensemble. But I mostly spent time with family matters and bringing up Gabe.

It wasn’t until 1987 that I formed the second version of **Mother Mallard**. In addition to using various kinds of synthesizers including **Yamaha FM, Roland analog, and Korg sampled sounds**, it included a voice—soprano **Ellen Hargis**, who was introduced to me by **Penny Crawford**, an old friend from the **Eastman School of Music**. We also added a wind player, composer **Les Thimmig**, who played several instruments. I had also

known Les from Eastman days. The keyboardist was **Lynn Purse**, who knew how to perform on synthesizers. I met her in Virginia with her husband **Bill**, a guitarist. Eventually we included my son **Gabe**, who had become a virtuoso electric guitarist. This band lasted until 1991 and gave many **American concerts**, two **European tours** and a major concert at **Town Hall in Manhattan**. Our last concert was at **Columbia University**. Although the performers were from various parts of the country and we didn't have much rehearsal time, it all worked because they were all well-trained professional musicians.

The 1990s were a decade I spent founding and organizing the electronic music section of Cornell's music department. I called the project the **Digital Music Program**, which offered classes in making music using synthesizers with **Apple Macintosh** computers. The courses became the most popular ones in the music department and when I retired in 2005, it became a permanent part of the department with a tenured track position. During this time period I gave a few synthesizer ensemble concerts with various local artists but mostly I returned to my jazz roots and gave many two-piano jazz concerts with my friend **Edward Murray**, who was a conductor and theorist in the music department.

When Ed died in 2000 I returned to my live synthesizer music and began working with **David Yearsley** and **Blaise Bryski**. David is one of the world's best organists and Blaise is an all-around excellent keyboardist and musician. They are both technically superior to me. This lineup often also featured **Gabe** as well as singer **Louise Mygatt**, a versatile musician who is a faculty member at the **Ithaca College School of Music**. This version of Mother Mallard lasted from 2000 until 2019 when we gave our 50th anniversary concerts. In 2006 I changed the live performance setup. Using **Reason and Samplit software**, we became a laptop-with-attached-keyboard-controllers ensemble—a computer ensemble. This made it much easier to travel. Sometimes the sponsor supplied the keyboards and we simply showed up with our laptops. But for our last concerts in 2019, we reverted back to analog using many of the same instruments as the original 1970s band. After these concerts I retired from public performing.

This double CD recording is our last one. We have been with **Cuneiform Records** since the 1980s. The middle **Mother Mallard** band recorded the entire **Continuing Story of Counterpoint** [released on 3 CDs by **Cuneiform Records**] as well as other pieces. Even the first two vinyl albums were reissued as CDs with bonus tracks. The original LPs have become collector's items. There have also been a few other CDs on my **Lameduck label**.

It's been a great 50 years with various ups and downs but it has always been fulfilling and continuously enlightening to be working with so many hard-working beautiful and generous people."

– **David Borden, 2023**