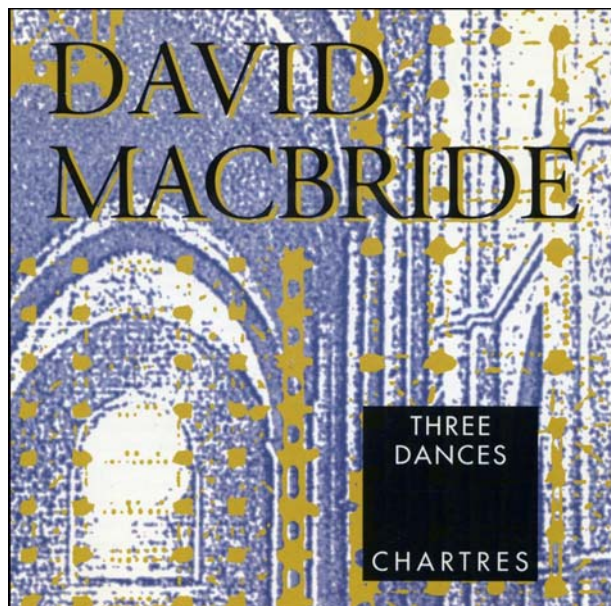


David Macbride



Three Dances for string quartet (1987) (30:02)

1. I. (9:42)
2. II. (10:23)
3. III. (9:57)

The Aurora String Quartet; Sharon Grebanier, violin; Mariko Smiley, violin; Basil Vendryes, viola; and Margaret Tait, cello

Chartres for solo piano (1989) (30:55)

4. In Strict Time (8:40)
5. Mazes (11:25)
6. Simply (10:50)

Kathleen Supové, piano

Total playing time: 60:57

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Notes

What sets **David Macbride** apart from many composers of his generation is his firm commitment to—and, indeed, his continuation of—the high modernist tradition that has shaped so much of the best twentieth-century music. By this I mean that his musical syntax is unified, complex, chromatic, and often frankly dissonant; he has neither fallen in love with the repeat sign nor proclaimed a born-again “return to tonality” and it is obvious that he has listened with profit to such masters as Arnold Schoenberg, Igor Stravinsky, and Béla Bartók.

Macbride would, therefore, be accepted by the academicians as a “serious” composer, in a way that most of the minimalists, conceptualists, new-tonalists, and various other late twentieth-century “-ists” might not. And yet Macbride’s work has none of the learned grayness of the academy; what impresses me about his music is its lyricism, its clarity, its precision, and its “accessibility” (in the best meaning of that much-abused word). While Macbride has never deliberately written down to his audience—“I don’t think it’s necessary to appeal to absolutely everyone,” he told me simply. This is always personal music: One has the sense, listening to Macbride’s best compositions, that he is saying just what he wants to say, in the most direct and elegant manner, without condescension or obfuscation.

This compact disc, the first devoted entirely to Macbride’s music, should win him many new listeners. I was introduced to his work some ten years ago, when he was living in New York and his chamber opera *The Pond In a Bowl* was presented by Golden Fleece Limited in a tiny midtown theater. I admired the way he seamlessly incorporated Eastern elements into what remained clearly a work of European-derived modernist art music, without any self-consciousness of facile Chinoiserie; I was also impressed by his ability to fashion distinct, cogent—and downright singable—vocal lines for his soloists. (Too many modern opera composers have

their tenors and sopranos leap around the bar lines like so many mountain goats.)

As it happens, Macbride, born in Berkeley, California, in 1951, is of Eurasian heritage and many of his works are, to use his words, “profoundly influenced by Chinese music and thought.” Macbride studied at the Hart School of Music (where he now teaches) and later at Columbia University, where he took his M.A. and D.M.A. He has been a fellow at the MacDowell Colony, at Yaddo, at the Ives Center for American Music, the Virginia Center for Creative Arts, and the Leighton Artists colony. He won the Leo Snyder Memorial Composition Prize, sponsored by the League/ISCM Boston in both 1986 and 1988 and has twice been a semifinalist in the Kennedy Center Friedheim Awards, the last time, in 1991, for the *Three Dances* recorded here. Macbride is currently composing a new work for the Aurora String Quartet, commissioned by Chamber Music America.

Macbride lives with his wife, the painter Lisa Macbride, and their son James Samuel, in the West End of Hartford, within a mile of the homes of such other historic Hartford notables as Mark Twain, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Wallace Stevens. “I believe in becoming as involved in your own community as possible,” he said. “You can chase that whole big city dream of fame and fortune or you can settle down and try to make a difference in people’s lives—a real difference, working in the schools, working in the local orchestra, and trying to be the best composer possible.”

The two works on this recording were both written in the late 1980s – the *Three Dances* in 1987, *Chartres* in 1989. Macbride chose the title of the first pieces as an homage to John Cage, whose *Three Dances for Two Prepared Pianos* he admires and because, he explains, although the three movements don’t need choreography, “they might adapt well to it, because each movement has strong rhythmic ideas.” And, despite a considerable rhythmic complexity, the *Dances*

flow. This is music that provides satisfaction yet contains depths and intricacies to inspire further listening.

The *Three Dances* originated during a trip to China. "Lisa and I had gone over with the Greater Hartford Youth Orchestra and we stayed on for a couple of weeks when the tour was over," he recalled. "In the middle of the night, I started hearing a passage in my head. And it wouldn't leave me alone and so I finally wrote it down and it ended up in the conclusions of both the second and third movements."

Chartres, as its title might suggest, also began with a sojourn abroad. "It was inspired by the great cathedral in Chartres," Macbride said. "I was particularly fascinated by the labyrinth in the center of the nave. I've been interested in musical mazes for about a decade and I've incorporated them into *Chartres* so that every performance will come out somewhat differently. The music is strictly notated but there are many choices the performer can make within the structure. The central movement is eight musical mazes, each one leading into the next, and any path that is chosen should provide a successful aesthetic totality. I wanted to write a large-scale piece that would reflect some of the magnificence I find in great works of architecture."

Indeed, to this listener, *Chartres* summons to mind another magnificent edifice, the literature of twentieth-century Modernist piano music. At various points during the piece, one may be reminded of such divergent composers as Berg, Barber, Messiaen, Prokofiev, and Carter. And yet *Chartres* never devolves into pastiche; rather, Macbride takes what he has learned from the past and, in his own manner, builds a contribution towards the future. T.S. Eliot entitled one of his finest essays "Tradition and the Individual Talent"; David Macbride has both of these qualities, and one will observe his progress with considerable interest.

—Tim Page

Kathleen Supové is one of the most captivating interpreters of New Music on the East Coast, having premiered countless works for solo piano and piano with ensemble. In 1984, she won second prize in the Gaudeamus Competition for interpreters Of Contemporary Music in Holland, as well as a special prize for best performance of a Dutch work. Since then, she has been a regular guest artist at the Summer Courses For New Music in Darmstadt, the June In Buffalo Composers Festival, and the Sonoklect Festival of New Music in Virginia. She has made numerous radio appearances on WGBH Radio, Boston; WNYC, New York, and WDR-Cologne, among others. In 1989, she received a Meet-the-

Composer/Reader's Digest Consortium Commissioning Grant for solo piano works from composers Donald Martino, Maurice Wright, and Matthew Greenbaum. Ms. Supové gives a regular series of concerts in Boston and New York City featuring new music for solo piano, entitled The Exploding Piano. She is a member of a newly formed, innovative trio The Bermuda Triangle that includes soprano Dora Ohrenstein and bassist Robert Black. In Boston, she is co-founder of and pianist for Extension Works, in addition to making frequent appearances with many local new-music groups. She has recorded a CD of new solo piano music by Marti Epstein, Lukas Foss, David Lang, Frederic Rzewski, and Randall Woolf for release on CRI's acclaimed Emergency Music series in late 1993. Her recording of *Five Incantations* by Giacinto Scelsi is available on the Neuma Records label. She also appears on Bridge Records, playing the Yamaha DX-7 in Jonathan Harvey's *From Silence*. In October 1993, she will appear as soloist with the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble, in the premiere of Randall Woolf's *Skin Deep* for Piano and Chamber Ensemble.

In 1987, the *New York Times* counted the **Aurora String Quartet**, now in its fourteenth season, as "among the Pacific elite" of chamber ensembles in the West. All four members are longtime members of the San Francisco Symphony. In 1983, Edo de Waart asked the quartet to perform in the Symphony's subscription series as soloists, and they appeared as part of the Symphony's Beethoven Festival in both 1990 and 1992. The Aurora String Quartet currently is an ensemble-in-residence for San Francisco's Old First Church Concert Series, and performs regularly throughout the Bay Area. In 1991, they performed for the Mozart Festival in Tahiti. Critics have applauded the Aurora String Quartet for its incisive, resonant, lyrical style and rhythmic intensity. It has mastered equally the repertoire of the Classical eighteenth and Romantic nineteenth centuries, but also has a vital interest in showcasing new twentieth-century works. The Aurora String Quartet has given West Coast premieres of works by Benjamin Lees, George Tsontakis, Robert Helps, and David Macbride, and has works by John Harbison, Charles Wuorinen, George Perle, Henri Dutilleux, Andrew Imbrie, and Sir Michael Tippett in their repertoire. In 1989, Benjamin Lees wrote his String Quartet No. 4 for the Aurora String Quartet, and in the 1992-93 season they will give the world premiere of a commissioned work by David Macbride and the East Coast premiere of Steven Jaffe's String Quartet No. 1.

Production Notes

Three Dances (1987)

Recorded October 20, 1991, at Pony Tracks Ranch, Portola Valley, CA. Recording Engineer: Jack Vad
Edited by David Budries, Sound Situation

Chartres (1989)

Recorded August 8, 1992 in John Knowles Paine Concert Hall, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.
Recording engineer: Joel Gordon. Edited by David Bundries, Sound Situation.
Both works published by American Composers Alliance (ACA), New York (BMI).

Three Dances premiered by the Arditti String Quartet, March 8, 1989, Town Hall, NYC. *Chartres* premiered April 18, 1990, by David Macbride, Bronson & Hutensky Theatre, Hartford, CT.
Mastered by Ellen Fitton, engineer at Sony Classical Productions, Inc., New York, NY.

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