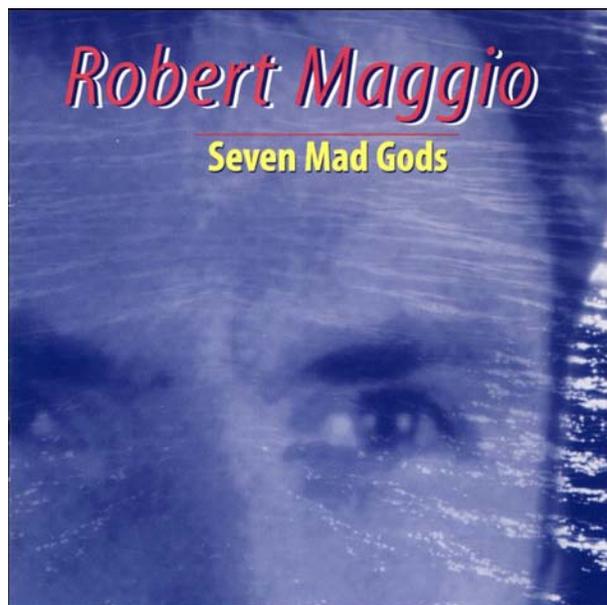


NWCR720

Robert Maggio

Seven Mad Gods



Winter Toccata (I Can't Believe You Want to Die) (1993) (21:53)

1. Lamenting and Raging (11:30)
2. Dancing and Singing (10:18)
John Koen, cello

Two Quartets (Desire, Movement, Love, Stillness) (1993) (21:19)

3. Desire, movement (7:26)
4. Love, stillness (13:50)
Bart Feller, flute; Kathleen Nester, flute;
Fred Sherry, cello; Jonathan Spitz, cello;
Bradley Lubman, conductor

Barcarole ("Seven Mad Gods Who Rule the Sea") (1994) (19:35)

5. Calm (3:34)
6. Sea (4:38)
7. Storm—Barcarole* (11:22)
Scott St. John, violin; John Koen, cello;
Hugh Sung, piano; Don Liuzzi, percussion;
Jennifer Higdon, conductor

* *Songs Without Words*, Op. 19, No. 6 by Felix Mendelssohn

Total playing time: 76:23

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Notes

I grew up listening mostly to rock and Broadway musicals—seldom to classical music. My favorite albums were the Beatles's *Abbey Road*, Kansas's *Leftoverture*, Elton John's *Captain Fantastic and the Brown Dirt Cowboy*, and Billy Joel's *Turnstiles*. I remember seeing musicals in New York with my family: *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Barnum*, and *Beatlemania*. On many Christmas eves, I sat spellbound at the New York City Ballet's *The Nutcracker*. I started composing at fifteen (the year after I stopped taking piano lessons)—mostly songs inspired by Broadway musicals and rock idols. It wasn't until I was in college, when I began to study composition more seriously, that I fell in love with new-classical, old-classical, classic-classical, ancient-classical (medieval and Renaissance), jazz, folk and world music.

My love of so many kinds of music is still leading me on an exciting personal exploration toward a fusion, an eclectic dialect. I communicate through my music using various components of existing languages, rather than inventing new ones. I write music that matters to me—music that explores my internal emotional life and the relationships between individuals. I encourage myself to write passionately, especially when daily concerns threaten to distract me from the fragility and humanity of life.

Winter Toccata (I Can't Believe You Want to Die) grew out of my volunteer work with AIDS patients and as a musical response to the polemics of Larry Kramer in his book, *Reports from the Holocaust: The Making of an AIDS Activist*. Initially, I strove to make the cello Kramer's voice, imitating the driving rhythms of his writing and creating melodies out of favorite sentences with the words written above the cello line. In doing so, I found a connection to the rhythm and passion of my own voice. What resulted was a vocal piece—especially at the start of the first movement. Cellist John Koen commissioned *Winter Toccata* in 1992 and premiered it on

April 25, 1994, at West Chester University.

I started composing *Two Quartets* (Desire, Movement, Love, Stillness) without conscious external inspirations, but rather followed the lead of my initial musical ideas and their characteristics: aggressive, kinetic, public. About halfway through the first movement, the music turned unexpectedly inward, becoming private and unassuming. I began to consider the piece as a kind of spiritual journey, exploring emotional transformation, from distortion and distraction to resolution and focus. The music moves through contrasting landscapes toward a culmination—the passage near the end of "Love, Stillness" where all four instruments converge in the upper register, waves of a single melody, out-of-sync, but finally all in the same place. This culmination offers neither an answer nor a definition; rather, it is what one finds in removing interference and noise—the empty space in which clarity exists.

I had a difficult time giving this composition a title, considering such ideas as "Divided States" or "Double Duo" to reflect the polarities, attractions and relationships between the two flutes and two cellos. When the piece was nearly finished, I began reading T. S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton" from *Four Quartets*. I was challenged on an intellectual and emotional level by Eliot's ideas of desire, movement, love, and stillness. For Eliot, desire—the obsession, the excess movement, the acute awareness of the passage of time—is not desirable. This is the state of the fast music in the first movement. Love, on the other hand, is un-desiring, a form of meditation, stillness, the harvesting of energy, timeless. This is the state toward which the music continually moves.

Flutist Bart Feller commissioned *Two Quartets* in 1993 and premiered it with Kathleen Nester, Fred Sherry, and Jonathan Spitz on April 4, 1994, at St. Bartholomew's Chapel in New York City.

Barcarole (seven mad gods who rule the sea) resulted from my “artistic blind date” with San Francisco choreographer Stephen Pelton at the American Dance Festival. We began with the image of shipwrecked people, drawing on Joseph Conrad’s “Youth” and, in particular, Stephen Crane’s “The Open Boat” from which we chose the work’s epigraph. Early on we decided to use a barcarole (a boat song of the Venetian gondoliers) as the central musical idea for our collaboration. At our first rehearsal together, we played Mendelssohn’s barcarole *Songs Without Words*, Op. 19, No. 6, as counterpoint to one of Stephen’s choreographic images: a young woman lying face down, washed ashore, unconscious, then awakening, numb and cold, only barely moving, slowly regaining feeling in her limbs. We were awed by the simple beauty of this marriage of music and movement. From that moment on, I focused intensely on Mendelssohn’s barcarole, taking it apart and putting it back together over and over again—its atoms forming the very substance and texture of all the melodies, harmonies, and rhythms in *Barcarole*. Mendelssohn’s boat song is heard in full at the end, drifting in from a faraway place and time, a distant memory.

Barcarole is dedicated to my father, Thomas E. Maggio, who loves sailing, ships (both model scale and actual size), and the sea. As I was writing this piece, I remembered one sunny afternoon in my childhood when he and I ventured not too far off the coast of Martha’s Vineyard in a little sailboat. There were gale-force winds, and though the actual danger was slight, I recall being very frightened as we tossed about in what seemed to be giant waves. Again and again, the sail caught a gust of wind and swung around, suddenly the boat capsized and my father and I tumbled into the water, bobbing to the surface for air. Rita Felciano of the *San Francisco Bay Guardian* described *Barcarole* as “a haunting meditation on death.” I have come to hear it as also a haunting meditation on life, survival, holding on, and remembering.

If I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees?

— Stephen Crane, “The Open Boat”

Barcarole was commissioned by the American Dance Festival under its young choreographer and composer-in-residence program. This program is supported in part by grants from the Jerome Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, Mary Duke Biddle Foundation, and Southern Arts Federation/Meet the Composer, Inc. *Barcarole* was premiered by Jean von Berg Sykes, Virginia Hudson, Mark Kuss, and Christopher Deane, conducted by Thomas Cabaniss, on July 12, 1994 at Reynolds Theater in Durham, NC.

This recording is dedicated to my mentors, for their encouragement, love, and support: Thomas and Beatrice Maggio, Leonard Ogren, Midge Guerrero, Micky Mathesius, Dennis Anderson, Harry Ballan, Dennis Rosa, Jonathan Berger, Michael Friedman, George Crumb, Jay Reise, Chinary Ung, and Richard Wernick.

— Robert Maggio

Born in New Jersey on January 8, 1964, **Robert Maggio** began piano studies at age seven, started composing at fifteen, and completed a one-act musical comedy the following year. He began private study of music theory and composition at seventeen, graduated magna cum laude with honors in music from Yale University in 1986, and subsequently received master’s and doctorate degrees in music composition from the University of Pennsylvania. His teachers included Dennis Anderson, Jonathan Berger, George Crumb, Michael Friedman, Jay Reise, Chinary Ung, and Richard Wernick.

Maggio has been commissioned and performed by numerous musicians and organizations, including the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Kennedy Center, Oakland East Bay Symphony, New York Festival of Song, Civic Orchestra of Chicago, Aspen Music Festival, American Dance Festival, New York Youth Symphony, Lincoln Center Out-of-Doors Festival, National Orchestral Association, Philadelphia Drama Guild, New York Theater Workshop, Stephen Pelton Dance Company, violinist Scott St. John, flutist Bart Feller, and cellist John Koen.

He has received awards, grants, and fellowships from ASCAP, BMI, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, Meet the Composer, the Barlow Endowment, American Music Center, the Bearn Prize, Yaddo, MacDowell Colony, Djerassi Resident Artists Program, American Dance Festival, West Chester University, and the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education.

Future projects include a work for the 1996 National Flute Convention in New York City, a work for the Detroit Chamber Winds, a piece for the Meridian Arts Ensemble for brass quintet and drums, and a third collaboration with the Stephen Pelton Dance Company in San Francisco.

Robert Maggio lives in Philadelphia with his partner, the artist Tony LaSalle, and is an associate professor of music theory and composition in the School of Music at West Chester University. His music is published by Theodore Presser Co., Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.

Bart Feller is principal flute with the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, and teaches flute at Rutgers University. He also appears regularly with the Stamford Symphony, Solisti New York and Bargemusic in Brooklyn. Mr. Feller studied at the Curtis Institute of Music with Julius Baker and John Krell.

Jennifer Higdon is a composer, conductor, and flutist. She is on the faculty of the Curtis Institute of Music. As a composer and flutist she is recorded on the I Virtuosi Records label.

John Koen joined the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1990, immediately following his studies at the Curtis Institute of Music with David Soyer. He frequently makes solo and chamber music appearances in the Philadelphia area, some of which have been broadcast over NPR as well as in Germany. Mr. Koen joined the faculty of Trenton State University in 1996.

Don Liuzzi is principal timpanist of the Philadelphia Orchestra, having previously played with the Pittsburgh Symphony for seven years. He is on the faculty of the Curtis Institute of Music, and is active with the Network for New Music in Philadelphia. Mr. Liuzzi was marimba and percussion soloist for the PBS children’s television show, *Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood*.

Bradley Lubman was music director of the Stony Brook from 1990–95, and from 1989–94, assistant conductor for the Festival of Contemporary Music at the Tanglewood Music Center. Mr. Lubman has conducted the Berlin Radio Symphony, the Steve Reich Ensemble, the ASKO Ensemble of Amsterdam, the Boston Symphony Chamber Players, the New York New Music Ensemble, the New Millennium Ensemble, and the SPIT Orchestra of Bang on a Can. He has recorded for the Bridge, CRI, Centaur, Koch, and Nonesuch labels.

Kathleen Nester is a native of Connecticut and a graduate of the Manhattan School of Music. She is a member of the flute sections of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, the Stamford Symphony and Solisti New York. She also freelances in New York City.

Hugh Sung has been an active solo pianist and chamber musician since his debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra at the age of 11. He has collaborated with such artists as Leila Josefowicz, Victor Dachenko, and Aaron Rosand—with whom he has recorded for the Biddulph and Vox labels.

Currently, Mr. Sung is staff pianist at the Curtis Institute of Music and also serves on the faculty of the Temple University Gifted Youth Music Program, where he teaches chamber music and theory, for which he has developed his own curriculum.

Fred Sherry has played with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the New Japan Philharmonic, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande. A founding member of TASHI, he has been performing with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center since the early 1970s and became an Artist of the Society in 1984.

Jonathan Spitz has performed throughout the world as cello soloist, chamber musician, and orchestral player. He is a founding member of the Leonardo Trio, and serves as principal cellist of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra and the Northeastern Pennsylvania Philharmonic. Mr. Spitz

performs frequently with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic. He was first prize winner in the Washington International Competition, and has been a finalist in the Concert Artists Guild and the Naumburg Chamber Music competitions.

Scott St. John is a native of Canada, now living in New York City. His career as a violinist was launched after winning the 1990 Young Concert Artists International Auditions, and his appearances as soloist include the Philadelphia Orchestra, the New York Chamber Symphony and the New Zealand Symphony. An avid chamber music performer, Scott is the founder and artistic director of the Millennium Chamber Music Society, a group of young musicians that tours the United States and Canada.

Production Notes

Produced by Robert Maggio and George Blood

Recorded and Mastered by George Blood

Assistant Engineers: Bill Hayward and Michael Levinson

Winter Toccata and Barcarole were recorded on May 22 and June 17, 1995, respectively, at the Settlement Music School in Germantown, PA.

Two Quartets was recorded on May 22, 1995, at historic St. Peter's Church in Chelsea, NYC.

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