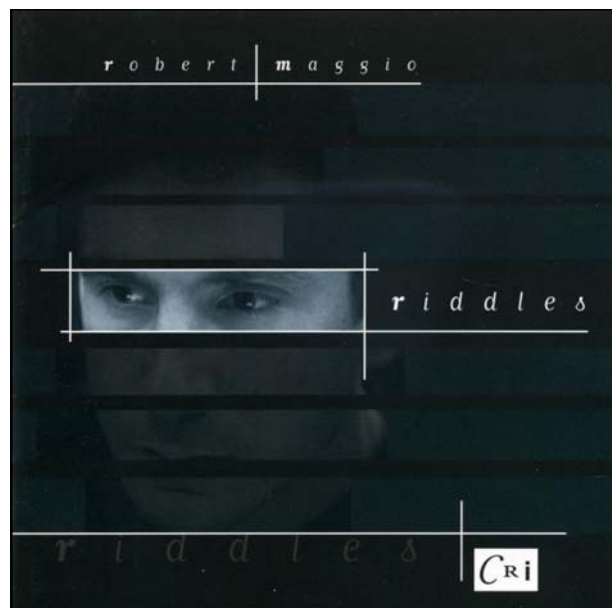


NWCR870

Robert Maggio

Riddles



<i>Duo Concertante</i> (1990)	(18:28)
1. I. Aggressive/Rhapsodic/Belligerent	(4:10)
2. II. Tender, conciliatory/Intimate, intense	(7:55)
3. III. Largo maestoso/Seething, incisive/ Belligerent/Cantabile/Tranquil	(6:18)
Scott St. John, violin; Robert Koenig, piano	
<i>Fluano Pianute</i> (1992)	(15:39)
4. I. bounce-minimalize	(2:00)
5. II. floatupspace-meditate	(4:22)
6. III. izimanlime-musical box	(2:24)
7. IV. beditate-mounce	(3:21)
8. V. musing boxical-spoatupflace	(3:23)
Bart Feller, flute; Robert Koenig, piano	
<i>Riddle</i> (1999)	(12:45)
9. I. A Ring That Has No End?	(3:40)
10. II. A Baby with No Cryin'?	(9:03)
James Stern, violin; Nathan Williams, clarinet; Audrey Andrist, piano	
<i>Divide</i> (1999)	(11:50)
11. I. Low	(2:23)
12. II. High	(4:21)
13. III. Divide	(4:53)
Daniel Grabois, horn; Colette Valentine, piano	
<i>Phoenix</i> (1998)	(10:05)
14. I. ... consuming itself in fire	(5:09)
15. II. ... rising renewed from the ashes ...	(4:54)
Tara Helen O'Connor and David Fedele, flutes	

Total playing time: 69:11

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Notes

There was a time, not too long ago, when the very concept of “tradition” was suspect among younger composers. Never mind the fact that by mid-century the avant-garde itself was becoming a tradition, with its own taboos, diktats, and establishments—composers were urged to be original, at all costs. And originality meant invention. It was often measured in terms of particular innovative techniques and notations, in advances in formal thinking, or in aesthetic concepts. (And in the postmodern era, things really haven’t changed. Now the very denial of originality, through appropriation, pastiche, and ironic commentary, can become a new shibboleth that cuts a composer off from deep sources of historical inspiration as surely as might the strictest modernist precepts.)

But being original is tough to do when one tries so consciously. It’s a little like trying not to think about the word “rhinoceros.” One can’t force originality, one can only cultivate it. It’s a function of personality, which deepens and matures at its own rate, often frustratingly slow in a culture that values only immediate success and superficial virtuosity.

Robert Maggio (b New Jersey, 8 Jan 1964) is a composer who is carefully cultivating his own form of originality, and he is doing it by linking with a very specific American musical tradition.

There is a continuing strain of American music whose core values might seem contradictory at first. On the one hand, it is

highly lyrical and tonal. On the other hand, it has never been afraid of complexity and individual expression. Of course, these values were never seen as paradoxical until mid-century, and most of the great music that has survived the twentieth century securely (including Stravinsky, Bartók, and Schoenberg) partakes of them. In America, such composers as Ned Rorem, David Diamond, Samuel Barber, and Leonard Bernstein have mined this rich vein. Their music, to which Maggio is an heir, proposes to the listener that tunes still matter; that imagination and fantasy can be manifested in both the minute details of a composition and its broad expressive curve; that popular sources can be transformed by learned techniques; that harmonic invention can be grounded in tonal sources and still remain fresh; that clarity of expression is no inhibitor of a richly textured, even emotionally ambiguous, vision.

Maggio begins this collection with the 1990 *Duo Concertante* for violin and piano, an impressively substantial and self-assured work for a twenty-six-year-old. The work emerged from direct, anecdotal personal experience (as do many of the composer’s works). On a New York subway, he witnessed a group of angry children harassing adult passengers, who took the abuse, “seemingly helpless and weak.” This aggressiveness became the motivating force behind the first movement, with its relentless, machine-gun repetitive motives in the violin. The second movement presents a complete contrast to

the first, and stands as the emotional core of the work. Here one encounters long-breathed, elegiac melody, supported by an accompaniment that derives in part from the modes of Indonesian gamelan music. The effect is of a poignant nocturne, ever growing in intensity. The final movement returns to the world of the first, but after its lyric predecessor, the language seems to be more dance than aggression.

Fluano Pianute (1992) is as playful as its predecessor is serious. This bracing little suite imagines its instruments as two active playmates, engaged in a series of intricate games. And, as its very title suggests, there is a formal conceit at work that gives the piece a distinctive cast beyond the charming tone of its melodies and gestures. The movement titles illustrate the principle: i.e., material from the end of one movement returns as the beginning of another throughout the piece. Thus, there is a strange sense of the work being a stream of rondos, braiding one over another. Most notable, and delightful, is the music-box motive, which abruptly runs out of steam at the end of the third movement, only to start the fifth (someone obviously had time to wind it back up during the fourth). The composer describes the resultant tone with comparable concision, stating “the landscape of the work is mercurial and varied, requiring of the players a mix of energy and lyricism, cheerfulness and spikiness, delicacy and excitement, irony and passion, charm and grace.”

The 1999 *Riddle* for clarinet, violin, and piano uses as its source the familiar Appalachian folksong “I Gave My Love a Cherry” (also known as the “Riddle Song”). The piece is a diptych, a study in contrasts using a single source. The first movement takes the song’s theme and its harmonies and distributes them, prismatically, among the three instruments, in an intricate web. The effect is dazzling: the texture is complex, but the roots of its activity are crystal clear. The result is a sort of *klangfarben* bluegrass. The second movement is an impassioned set of variations, with a tone that alternates between meditative and rhapsodic. It also explores the diverse harmonic resources of the tune as it modulates through a series of chromatically related keys and modes.

Divide, for horn and piano, also dates from 1999, and also comes from a seemingly commonplace image that captured Maggio’s imagination. An interstate highway sign indicating the bifurcation of I-95 north and south (which he passes almost every day) began to suggest a theme akin to “the road not taken.” The three movements are structured so as to suggest extremely different environments. The first restricts itself to the low register of both instruments and is propulsive. The second is still and contemplative, and resides in the ether of the upper registers (and uses a row from Schoenberg’s Op.23, No.5, a source that few would associate with this tender music hearing it uninformed). It seems that one theme of Maggio’s art is the search for reconciliation, and this work’s third movement is a fine example. The “dividing line” between the first two movements, the E-F at the keyboard’s center, becomes an oscillating figure in the piano against which the horn can sing—and then the roles are reversed. Thus the two instruments and the two registers are exchanged and blended.

Maggio has a particular affinity for the flute, as evidenced by its prominence in the works on his previous CRI release (“Seven Mad Gods,” CRI 720). *Phoenix* was written in 1998 for the Annual AIDS Memorial Concert of the National Flute Convention, and is an evocation of the mythical creature that renews itself by rising from the ashes of the fire that had consumed it. The work’s two movements share the same aching poignant motive, which features a slight microtonal bend downward at the end of the phrase—in contrast to the

general upward thrust of the music over the course of the piece—as the two flutes vie with one another to achieve even greater levels of ecstasy with their shared material.

Maggio’s music reaches the listener and touches one immediately. It is expressively direct yet learnedly intelligent, concise but dense in meaning, and never failing in its pursuit of beauty. He is cultivating his voice like a garden, with patience, care, and discipline.

—Robert Carl

Composer **Robert Carl** is chair of the composition department at the Hartt School, University of Hartford. He is a codirector of the Boston new music ensemble Extension Works and writes frequently on new music for *Fanfare* magazine.

Canadian pianist **Audrey Andrist** (heard here performing *Riddle*) is the 1994 first prizewinner of the San Antonio International Keyboard Competition and was presented in a cross-Canada solo recital tour as winner of the Eckhart-Gramatte Competition. She has appeared as a soloist with the National Arts Center Orchestra in Ottawa, the Juilliard Orchestra in Alice Tully Hall, and the CBC Vancouver Symphony. As a chamber musician, Andrist has performed in New York’s Merkin Hall and Steinway Hall, at Place des Arts in Montreal, Spivey Hall in Georgia, and on the live program “Around New York” on WNYC. She has participated in premieres of new works in Canada and the United States and has recorded for Albany Records, Summit Records, and CBC Radio. Andrist currently lives in California with her husband, James Stern, and their son, Kenneth.

Flutist **Tara Helen O’Connor** (heard here performing *Phoenix*) is a member of the 1995 Naumburg Award-winning New Millennium Ensemble and of the world renowned Bach Aria Group. She performs regularly with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Orpheus, Bargemusic, Spoleto U.S.A., the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, Music from Angel Fire, and in festivals in Europe; most recently, she appeared as a soloist at the Mostly Mozart Festival. She has collaborated with the Orion, Borromeo, and St. Lawrence string quartets. O’Connor has recorded for Arcadia, CRI, Koch International, Bridge, and New World Records

Violinist **Scott St. John** (heard here performing *Duo Concertante*) is an avid chamber musician and a regular participant at the Marlboro Music Festival in Vermont. He is also passionate about twentieth-century music, and has developed a concerto repertoire ranging from Korngold to Ligeti, as well as ongoing associations with emerging composers. Born in London, Ontario, Scott began violin studies at the age of three with Richard Lawrence; his other teachers include David Cerone, Arnold Steinhardt, and Felix Galimir, and in 1990 he graduated from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. Scott recently joined the music faculty at the University of Toronto, where he teaches violin, viola, and chamber music.

Violinist **James Stern** (heard here performing *Riddle*) has appeared as soloist and chamber musician throughout North America, most notably at Carnegie Hall and Alice Tully Hall in New York, the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., and at the Ravinia Festival in Chicago. His summer activities have included performances at the prestigious Marlboro Music Festival, as well as the Norfolk and Bowdoin festivals. He has performed in concert on “Voice of America,” WNCN-New York, and WCLV-Cleveland, and on WVTF-Roanoke, in a concert broadcast from the Sonoklect Festival. He has appeared as soloist with the Woodstock Chamber Orchestra, the Stockton Symphony, and the Contra Costa Chamber

Orchestra. Stern is currently associate professor of violin at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California.

Flutist **David Fedele** (heard here performing *Phoenix*) concertizes with Trio Fedele, with cellist Eric Gaenslen and pianist Robert Koenig, and in duos with marimbist Makoto Nakura and with harpist Victoria Drake. In New York, Fedele has performed and recorded with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Ensemble 21, Ensemble Sospeso, Columbia Sinfonietta, the Steve Reich Ensemble, Bang On A Can, and the Group for Contemporary Music. Fedele has performed internationally as soloist and in recital. Some concerto appearances include performances with the National Chamber Orchestra, the New York Symphonic Ensemble, and the Charlotte, Knoxville, and Green Bay symphony orchestras. Festivals at which he has appeared include the Elan International Festival, the Vermont Mozart Festival, the Grand Canyon Festival, and Spoleto. Fedele is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music and the Juilliard School.

Flutist **Bart Feller** (heard here performing *Fluano Pianute*) is principal flutist of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, the Stamford Symphony, and Solisti New York Orchestra. He has also performed with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the New York Philharmonic, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Bargemusic, and at the Marlboro Music Festival. He is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music and is on the faculty of Rutgers University. Feller's solo CD, "Elysian Fields," features a work by Robert Maggio and is available at www.bartfeller.com.

Hornist **Daniel Grabois** (heard here performing *Divide*) is a member of the Meridian Arts Ensemble, the Curiously Strong Quintet, and Sequitur. He also performs frequently throughout New York and on tour with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, St. Luke's Chamber Orchestra, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, and New York City Opera Orchestra. An instructor of French horn at the Hartt School of Music and at Princeton University, Grabois has also played with many rock and jazz ensembles, including Duran Duran.

Pianist **Robert Koenig** (heard here performing *Duo Concertante* and *Fluano Pianute*) performs regularly in major centers throughout North and South America, Europe, and Asia and

has collaborated with such noted artists as Aaron Rosand, Elmar Oliviera, Sarah Chang, and Pamela Frank. In addition to his many festival appearances throughout the world, Koenig has recorded for Biddulph, Dorian, and Artek Records. Born in Canada, Koenig received his initial training at the Vancouver Academy of Music and later received both his bachelor's and master's degrees from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. Currently, he is staff pianist at the Curtis Institute.

Clarinetist **Nathan Williams** (heard here performing *Riddle*) has been hailed by critics for his "outstanding musicality and flawless technique." He is the recipient of prizes and honors from the International Gaudeamus Interpreters Competition, the Eastman Concerto Competition, the William C. Byrd Young Artists Competition, the International Clarinet Competition, and the Naumburg International Competition. He was a featured soloist at the 1995 International Clarinet Association's ClarinetFest, as well as resident artist at the Banff Centre and a fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center, where Maestro Seiji Ozawa presented him with the C. D. Jackson Award. Williams is associate professor of clarinet at East Carolina University and is principal clarinet with the Winston-Salem Symphony. He and Audrey Andrist recently recorded a CD of American music for the Albany Records label.

Pianist **Colette Valentine** (heard here performing *Divide*) has performed extensively throughout the United States, Asia, and Europe in varied settings, including Merkin Hall, Weill Recital Hall, and the 92nd Street Y in New York City; the Kennedy Center's Terrace Theatre and Concert Hall and the Corcoran and National galleries in Washington, D.C.; Suntory Hall and Casals Hall in Tokyo; Hoam Hall in Seoul; and the Louvre in Paris. She has collaborated on recordings for the Albany, Antara, Fontec, and Well-Tempered labels, and her ensemble, Ecco Trio, has repeatedly toured the United States and Japan to critical acclaim. Valentine serves as pianist-in-residence for numerous international competitions and events and is on the faculties of New Jersey City University, Long Island University, and the Interlochen Chamber Music Conference.

Production Notes

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