

GORDON MUMMA  
*MUSIC FOR SOLO PIANO 1960-2001*

DAAN VANDEWALLE, PIANO  
80686-2 [2CDs]

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- Jardin** (1958-97), for Michelle Fillion 13:57
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  2. tricycle and fence 2:40
  3. coulisse pour Michelle 1:33
  4. lunar asparagus, d'après Max Ernst 1:56
  5. planted song 1 1:45
  6. planted song 2 1:18
  7. planted song 3 1:19
  8. planted song 4 1:36
- 9 Songs without Words** (1990s) 25:58
9. for Christian Wolff 3:40
  10. *soprapensiero*, for Dominic Gill 2:35
  11. for Richard Felciano 2:39
  12. for Younhie Kim 1:31
  13. for Jon Barlow 3:01
  14. for Merrill Lynn Taylor 2:09
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  16. for George Exon 3:12
  17. for David Revill 3:47
- 18. Suite for Piano** (1960) 4:45
- I. 76/104
  - II. 50/64
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- Graftings** (1990-96), for Daan Vandewalle 7:41
19. scion 1:21
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  21. scion 1:15
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  23. grafting & slipwaltz 1:10
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**Four Pack Ponies** (1996), for the Taylor cousins 10:10

- 25. Bay 1:37
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- 27. Dun 3:21
- 28. Chestnut dreams 2:40

**Basket of Strays** 9:46

- 29. Treble Song (1996) 2:49
- 30. Soft Saloon Song (1977) 2:34
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- 32. Clavichord at 18 (1997) 1:27
- 33. Un bocado de tango (de los desaparecidos) (1970) :52
- 34. Octal Waltz (1980) 1:02

DISC 2: 71:07

**19 from the Sushibox:**

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- 2. Octet, for David Behrman 1:35
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- 4. for William Colvig 1:47
- 5. for C. T. Mumma 2:59

**3 Perspectives** (1966-96), in memoriam Jacqueline Leuzinger 4:09

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- 7. Perspective 2 :44
- 8. Perspective 3 1:25

**11 Sushihorizontals** (1986-96) 16:06

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- 12. for James Klosty 1:25
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- 15. for Christopher at 15 (*time flies like two arrows*) :20
- 16. for Carolyn Brown 1:23
- 17. for Bun-Ching Lam 1:43
- 18. for Anatole Leikin 1:09
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**Sixpac Sonatas (1985-97)** 15:41

- 20. for H. Wiley Hitchcock 1:08
- 21. for Julia Wilson Jones 2:59
- 22. for Homer Keller 2:24
- 23. for David Bernstein 3:42
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**Threesome (1996)** 9:50

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- 28. 3 of a Threesome 1:34

**Eleven Note Pieces & Decimal Passacaglia (1978)** 5:39

- 29. à Luigi Dallapiccola :25
- 30. à Durand Begault :18
- 31. à Diane Carlson :35
- 32. à Graciela Paraskevaïdis :34
- 33. à Padre Mujica :57
- 34. à Jacques Bekaert :11
- 35. à Pauline Oliveros 1:09
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- 37. à Linda Burman-Hall :11
- 38. à Coriún Aharonián :54
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## Gordon Mumma's Music for Solo Piano (1960–2001)

Gordon Mumma is best known for his pioneering role in the development and evolution of electronic and live-electronic music in works such as *Hornpipe* (1967) and *Pontpoint* (1980), and for his legendary cybersonic performances on horn. The piano has played a significant if underestimated role in his career. With a few notable exceptions, this collection by pianist Daan Vandewalle marks the first commercial recordings of Mumma's music for solo piano composed over more than forty years. It provides an important new perspective on his work as a composer.

Mumma's most influential piano teacher was George Exon, with whom he studied at the Interlochen Music Camp in the early 1950s. Together they explored Béla Bartók's *Mikrokosmos*—the spare textures, irregular rhythms, and pungent dissonances of Bartók's miniatures echo in Mumma's piano music. The keyboard music of Bach and Haydn, of Schoenberg, Webern, Ives, Ernst Krenek, Carl Ruggles, and Ruth Crawford also shaped his early piano ideal, as did the experience of superb recitalists in Detroit and Ann Arbor, including Walter Gieseck, Dame Myra Hess, and Glenn Gould. Mumma's own performances as a pianist were often in piano ensembles, partnered with Tudor, Cage, Jon Barlow, Toshi Ichiyangi, and others. In the 1960s he also toured internationally in a two-piano team with composer-pianist Robert Ashley in a series entitled "New Music for Pianos." Several of Mumma's performances with Ashley and Tudor have been recorded (see Discography).

The works of the early 1960s were written for the concert hall, but much of the later piano music is more personal—the solitary dreams of a long musical life. And like dreams it filters memories—of music of the distant and recent past, of artistic friendships and loved ones living or dead—to create a uniquely contemporary approach to the piano. In contrast to Mumma's epic electronic works, his keyboard music is predominantly poetic in its brevity, concentration, and psychological depth. It is music of high specific gravity, each piece a microcosm of finely etched ideas that unfold without literal repetition. For Daan Vandewalle, it is also "music of dialogue" that communicates—both with the listener and within itself—through its deep concern with sound, phrasing, color, dynamic range, and rhetorical nuance. It demands much of the pianist, and does not reveal its secrets on first hearing.

The *Suite for Piano* is Mumma's first major piano work, and fulfills a role similar to that of Alban Berg's Piano Sonata Op. 1 as the point of departure into compositional maturity. He began work on it in Tanglewood, Massachusetts, in August 1959, and completed it in March 1960 in Ann Arbor. It was premiered by Ashley at the first ONCE Festival in February 1961. Like his *Etude on Oxford Changes* for solo violin (1957) and *Large Size Mograph 1962*, it reflects Mumma's preoccupation with flexible serial procedures at that time. It is a "suite" in the limited sense of a collection of four brief, etude-like movements played in close succession. The numbered title for each suggests the range of tempo possibilities.

The *Suite for Piano* summarizes many of the distinctive features of Mumma's piano music of the next forty years. The prelude (seen in autograph as Example 1) demonstrates his characteristic compression in its single, super-charged measure.

**Ex. 1: Suite for Piano (1960), Part 1**

The image shows a musical score for a single measure, labeled 'L. 76/104'. The score is written on six staves. The top staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The bottom staff has a bass clef. The music is characterized by complex, compressed notation with many notes and rests. Dynamics include *mp*, *f*, *ff*, *p*, and *mf*. There are also markings for *pp* and *fz*. The score is divided into sections by brackets with time signatures: 54, 32, 54, and 32. Dashed lines connect notes across staves, indicating chords. The notation is dense and intricate, typical of Mumma's style.

Its innovative notation across six staves frees the pianist to choose the register of selected chords (those connected by dashes). The polymetric rhythms and wide displacements, which have precedents in the music of Ives, Carter, and Messiaen, are enhanced by constantly changing dynamics. Concealed in the atomized texture, however, are traces of melody suggestive of Mumma's admiration for the counterpoint of Bach and the Second Viennese School. The second piece expands on ideas from the prelude in a succession of distinctive units, while the third is a punchy romp built on a descending chromatic row. The final movement is the heart of the work, a study in piano sonority and extended time.

The *Large Size Mograph 1962* is the only piece exclusively for piano solo in a collection of various-sized *Mographs* written in 1962-4. They derive their time-structures (and punning title) from seismographic recordings of earthquakes or underground nuclear tests. Although the pitches, registers, and vertical combinations are the composer's choice, the rhythmic attacks and some of the dynamics are pre-determined by the seismic wave patterns. As Mumma has commented: "I was intrigued with the relationship similarities between the time-travel patterns of P and S waves and the sound-reflection characteristics of musical performance spaces." The resulting soundscape unfolds with the unpredictable conviction of nature. It was premiered by Larry Leitch at the ONCE Festival in December 1962 (see Discography).

The piano music of the 1970s and 1980s consists of the *Eleven Note Pieces & Decimal Passacaglia*, *Sixpac Sonatas*, and *Threesome*. Composed during Mumma's years at the University of California, these works reflect a more "neoclassical" approach to form and texture responsive to the performance resources of those years. A sign of the times was his collaboration in the late 1970s in the building of historical replicas of a 17th-century Flemish harpsichord and an 18th-century portable clavichord, on which he composed and performed.

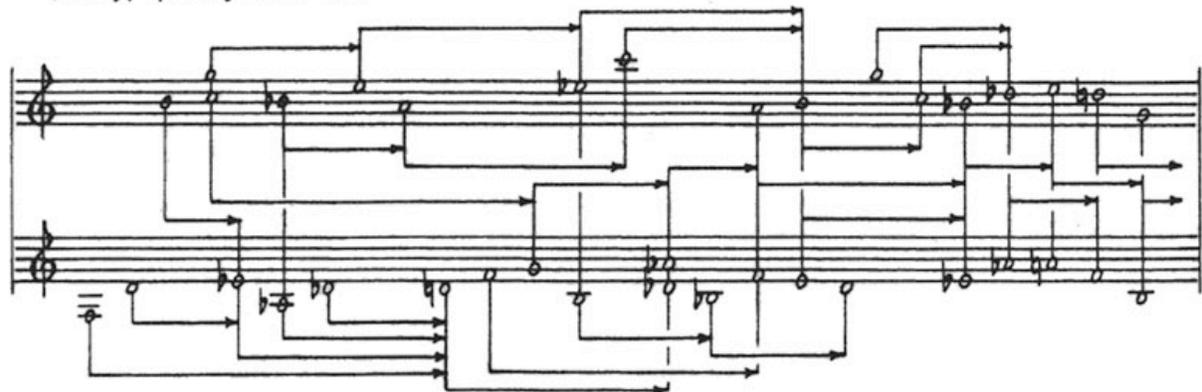
The *Eleven Note Pieces & Decimal Passacaglia* were conceived for the baroque harpsichord, with its limited pitch and dynamic range. Mumma also advocates their performance on the clavichord, fortepiano, or modern piano, with the avoidance of “exaggerated dynamics, performance nuance and gesture.” Composed in Santa Cruz, California, in 1978, the set was premiered there in March 1979 by the harpsichordist Durand Begault (the dedicatee of the second piece). Previous recordings on harpsichord are those by the composer and by Linda Burman-Hall, another dedicatee (see Discography). The title refers to both the number of pieces and the restriction of each to eleven pitches, plus a closing passacaglia based on ten variations of a ten-note repeating bass line (hence the “Decimal”). Other individual movements also refer to baroque keyboard forms (including the toccata, fantasia, and gigue), with a late twentieth-century statistical approach to the distribution of pitches and articulations.

The *Eleven Note Pieces* initiate Mumma’s later piano style in their almost exaggerated brevity and their initial intention for private use. The work is also a form of musical autobiography, with tributes to significant friends and associates that include composers Luigi Dallapiccola and Robert Ashley, photographer-composer Jacques Bekaert, and cousin Carolyn Cook. There are snapshots of Mumma’s 1968 Latin-American tour with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company and his residencies in Uruguay (1975) and Argentina (1977) in pieces for composer Graciela Paraskevaídís and composer-carpenter Eduardo Bértola, or in memory of Padre Mujica, a priest of the urban poor assassinated in Argentina in 1974. Together they form a ravishing cycle of fragments, none more understated than the eleven-fold intonation on a single note for Uruguayan composer Coriún Aharonián. Mumma’s bell-like etude for Pauline Oliveros, seen in Example 2, uses graphic notation to indicate pitch duration and release.

**Ex.2 For Pauline Oliveros, from *Eleven Note Pieces & Decimal Passacaglia* (1978)**

7/5 a Pauline Oliveros

Slowly, quietly bell-like



The set of *Sixpac Sonatas* was initiated in 1985 with a request to contribute to a commemorative volume for musicologist H. Wiley Hitchcock, with whom Mumma had studied at the University of Michigan. Hitchcock's research on both French baroque and twentieth-century American music elicited a compact fusion of past and present. Mumma's enjoyment in the project inspired an additional five sonatas over the next few years. Like the *Eleven Note Pieces*, the *Sixpac Sonatas* are playable on piano or harpsichord. In form, all six are variants of the classic AABB + coda form that has precedents in both the eighteenth-century harpsichord sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti and the prepared-piano *Sonatas and Interludes* of John Cage. Some of the sonatas follow this model more strictly, while those for architect Julia Wilson Jones and composer Homer Keller are freer in form, with constant manipulation of the musical ideas and concealed repetitions interspersed with contrasting fragments. The closing codas of all six sonatas witness some of Mumma's most inventive transformational writing. The last sonata was completed only in 1997, when he found an appropriate closure in its heroically difficult coda. When viewed as a set, the *Sixpac Sonatas* are a significant addition to the genre of the piano sonata in the twentieth century.

Although arranged for piano in 1996, *Threesome* is a reworking of several trio-divertimenti for mixed ensembles from Mumma's *Faisandage et Galimafrée* (1973–83), and as such relates to the works of those years. He has called this piano set an "indulgence," which allowed him to vary and restructure the earlier pieces from a new perspective. Like the "Minuet al Rovescio e Trio Extruduto" from *Faisandage* on which it is based, the second *Threesome* reinterprets the Minuet from Haydn's Symphony No. 47 of 1772 (which Haydn too had reworked for solo piano in the Sonata Hob. XVI: 26). Mumma's minuet is—like Haydn's—a palindrome (reversing midway), while its middle section mimics the typical alternating rhythm of many trios from Haydn's early keyboard sonatas. On the whole, however, it subverts classical order in its increasingly wayward digressions that mysteriously find their way back to their source. The third *Threesome* is a transcription of the "March Waltz" from *Faisandage*. The first *Threesome* is perhaps the gem of the set. It alludes freely to materials of *Faisandage* (its "Fanfare," "March Waltz," and "Notturmo" movements) to create a spacious tableau of fragments, each a distinctive gesture of no more than several seconds in length. The resulting assortment of finely crafted sound-bites is only in the most ironic sense a *Galimafrée* (a badly cooked stew made from scraps, according to the *Larousse Gastronomique*).

The works of the 1990s consists of miniatures for modern piano grouped into collections. Although parts of these collections derive from sketches from the 1960s or earlier, much of the work was completed in a burst of compositional activity in the mid-1990s following Mumma's early retirement from academia.

*Jardin* is a suite of eight pieces completed in 1997, but building on sketches that go back as early as 1958. Its premiere by Daan Vandewalle took place in Madrid in March 2008. *Jardin* celebrates the "garden of a long life" as elaborated by the composer: "In my New England childhood were elms, birches, and poplars (many of the latter came down in a 1938 hurricane, one of my first experiences of loss), a tricycle and fences, and the moon. In our World War II 'victory-garden' were planted fruits and vegetables, and even my mother's attempt at asparagus. When I met Max Ernst in the south of France in 1970, the moon joined the asparagus." Mumma has special affection for the four "planted songs," two of which "are from the same seeds, but as seeds do, grew differently, like different grapes from the same stock."

The nine *Songs without Words* of the 1990s are individual pieces that explore various compositional approaches. Those for Taylor and Kim seem to take their title at face value, unfolding in a single lyrical gesture. The pair for Felciano and Exon juxtapose in their outer sections the motivic-contrapuntal procedures of the *Sixpac Sonatas* with a contrasting central episode that explodes with spectral pitches splattered across the keyboard. Perhaps most unusual are the pieces for Christian Wolff, Dominic Gill (*soprapensiero*), and David Revill, each of which evokes a timeless sound-space. Special to all three are their extended techniques for the damper-raising and *sostenuto* pedals of the grand piano, with a huge dynamic range that includes near-silence of resonating partials. The elegy for David Tudor was written on the day of his death (August 13, 1996): “After being informed that day by telephone,” Mumma has written, “I had only the impetus to create something.” Its late-romantic aura recalls Tudor’s affectionate playing of Alkan, Debussy, or Scriabin when among special friends.

*Graftings* (1990–96), dedicated to Daan Vandewalle, revisits the botanical metaphor of the “planted songs” from *Jardin*. The six pieces germinated from a single shoot—a chord of E, C, E flat, heard at the start of each—but each grows differently. In tone they are austere and rigorously asymmetrical, except for the wistful slip of a waltz in the penultimate piece.

The titles of the *Four Pack Ponies*—Bay, Connemara, or Dun—celebrate the various types of pony that Mumma encountered in New Mexico in the mid-1990s. They are dedicated to his four Taylor cousins, with whom he had spent childhood summers there. Like *Jardin* this set is evocative rather than exploratory, with the most complex vignette given to the Chestnut, caught nodding off in the hot afternoon.

The most eclectic set is the *Basket of Strays*, which assembles six wild children of varied parentage. **Treble Song** (1996) is the piano version of a lyrical dialogue for flute and piano or guitar. **Soft Saloon Song** (1977) is a set of variations on a mysteriously forlorn scrap of a tune. It was composed for dancer-choreographer Jann McCauley of the Portland Dance Theatre for her closing solo in the dance piece *Earheart: Flights, Formations, and Starry Nights*. Originally performed with the top line played by an Argentinian bandoneón, the solo piano version makes for an especially dense web of inner lines. The tang of the bandoneón is also recreated in **Un bocado de tango** (a bite of tango), composed in 1970 during a time of political upheaval in South America. When performed there, the inflammatory subtitle “de los desaparecidos”—referring to the lost victims of military rule—had to be omitted, but their fate is chillingly depicted in its abrupt ending. The rambunctious **Tearing off: a piece** of 2001 was written in response to a title too good to resist. **Clavichord at 18**, with its period embellishments, was composed for the birthday of Mumma’s handmade instrument. The tipsy **Octal Waltz** was written in 1980 for a harpsichord specially tuned in eight-note equal temperament, making it perhaps the earliest example of this unusual microtonal tuning. When played on a piano in twelve-tone equal temperament (as here), it views the romantic waltz as if through a distorting mirror.

The pieces *From the Sushibox* form an ongoing collection of works. Of these, the *Sushiverticals* and *Sushihorizontals* are each notated on a single page and are rarely more than two minutes in length. Like the contents of a sushi-box, they were prepared swiftly with relatively few ingredients to create morsels both nourishing and aesthetically pleasing. They were assembled into two sets in 1996; the designations “vertical” or “horizontal” refer to the page-format (upright or landscape). The dedications honor friends and colleagues esteemed for their creative work. These works are ideally suited to the recording medium; many of their subtle resonances are audible only under optimal listening conditions.

The *Sushiverticals* (1996) are character portraits of five unique individuals. The first piece, dedicated to Merce Cunningham (see Example 3), illustrates many features of the set. Its additional bottom staff represents the pitches that are pressed without sounding and sustained with the middle (*sostenuto*) pedal.

Ex. 3 Sushivertical for Merce Cunningham (1996)

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system (measures 1-6) features a piano staff with dynamics *mf*, *p*, *ppp*, *mf*, *mp*, and *p*. The bass staff has dynamics *p*, *mp*, *p*, *fff*, and *ff*. The second system (measures 7-15) features a piano staff with dynamics *p*, *mf*, *f*, *p*, *f*, *ff*, *f*, *p*, and *ff*. The bass staff has dynamics *pp*, *mp*, *f*, and *ff*. A sostenuto pedal staff is located at the bottom of each system, with a bracket labeled '124' under the first system and a circled '15' in the second system. Approximate measure numbers are indicated above the staves: ≈ 120, ≈ 55, ≈ 150, ≈ 55, ≈ 120 in the first system; and ≈ 160, ≈ 120, ≈ 250, ≈ 55 in the second system.

The two conventional staves also include three “catch pedals” (in which a percussive tone is caught by the damper-raising right pedal immediately after it is struck to create an after-resonance). Its content echoes what Mumma calls the “contrasts of speed and space” of Cunningham’s physical gestures—the small movements at the extremes of hand or foot, the held positions, and the “staccato blur” of his kinetic bursts. The “Octet” for David Behrman, eight discrete chords sustained throughout, honors the elegance of this “gently sonorous person.” Lou Harrison’s piece is a tribute to a “wonderfully legato individual,” while that for his companion Bill Colvig is more complicated, reflecting the “quiet vigor” of an energetic builder. The subtle “painterly study” for the composer’s father is performed slowly and freely with the left pedal (*una corda*) depressed throughout, which softens the harmonics.

The set of *Three Perspectives*, completed and assembled in the *Sushibox* in 1996, exists in relative isolation from its surroundings. Perhaps Mumma’s most private work, it was sketched in late 1966 following the tragic death of his wife, Jacqueline Leuzinger. He returned to the pieces repeatedly in the 1970s and 1980s in an ongoing process of grief. The outer movements are somber reflections on a shared chromatic theme; they surround the anguished outburst of the central movement to form a triptych unique among his piano works.

The eleven *Sushihorizontals* (1986–96) are assembled within a framework provided by the pieces for poet Jackson Mac Low, theoretical mathematician Paul Erdős, and composer-critic Charles Shere, which are assigned positions 1, 6, and 11 as desired by the pianist. Grouped symmetrically around the centerpiece are four movable pairs (2/10, 3/9, 4/8, 5/7) that are related to one another for musical or personal reasons. The birthday portraits for Mumma’s two sons exude youthful energy (5/7), while the pair for Agnes Martin and Bun-Ching Lam (3 and 9) feature austere repeated tones. The *Sushihorizontals* are perhaps Mumma’s most austere and exploratory piano set. His more recent compositions include *From the Rendition Series* (2006) and *Gambrelled Tapestry* (2007), which combine piano and electronics with newly evolving construction-set procedures.

—Michelle Fillion

*Musicologist Michelle Fillion is Associate Professor of Musicology at the University of Victoria (British Columbia, Canada). Her research includes numerous essays on the instrumental music of Haydn and Beethoven, editions of classical keyboard music, and a forthcoming book on the music in the literary world of novelist E. M. Forster.*

**Gordon Mumma** was born in 1935 in Framingham, Massachusetts. He studied horn and piano in Chicago and Detroit. In 1952 Mumma entered the University of Michigan, where he engaged with the composers in the class of Ross Lee Finney. In Ann Arbor he co-founded with Robert Ashley the Cooperative Studio for Electronic Music (1958–66), and again with Ashley collaborated in Milton Cohen’s Space Theatre (1957–64) along with a group of uniquely creative individuals in art, architecture, and film. Mumma was one of the organizers of the historic ONCE Festival (1961–66), which made Ann Arbor an important site for the performance of innovative new music. From 1966 to 1974 he was, with John Cage and David Tudor, a composer-musician with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, for which he composed four commissioned works, including *Mesa* (1966) and *Telepos* (1971). During these years he also performed in the Sonic Arts Union with Ashley, David Behrman, and Alvin Lucier. From 1975 to 1994 he was a Professor of Music at the University of California. In 2000 Mumma received the biennial John Cage Award of the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, New York.

Belgian pianist **Daan Vandewalle** (born in 1968) is an internationally recognized specialist in new music, with a focus on twentieth-century American piano repertoire. He studied at the Royal Conservatory of Ghent (Belgium) with Claude Coppens, and at Mills College (Oakland, California) with Alvin Curran. He is a Fellow of the Belgian-American Educational Foundation, and teaches piano at the Royal Conservatory of Ghent. Ever since his debut in 1992, Vandewalle's repertoire has become increasingly diverse and challenging, both technically and intellectually. His programs often combine music by such contemporaries as Alvin Curran, Clarence Barlow, Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff, Olivier Messiaen, Elliott Carter, and Frederic Rzewski with classical works by Chopin, Brahms, Liszt, Mussorgsky, or Busoni. As an improviser he has collaborated widely with David Moss, Fred Frith, Han Bennink, Chris Cutler, Barry Guy, and others. He also forms a duo with Australian pianist Geoffrey Douglas Madge. Vandewalle's recordings include Charles Ives's "Concord" Sonata (Gailly), Fred Frith's *Seven Circles* (Tzadik), and most recently, a highly acclaimed 4-CD set of Alvin Curran's *Inner Cities* (Long Distance Classics) released in 2005. Since 2007 Vandewalle has been programming Gordon Mumma's piano music regularly on his recitals.

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#### PUBLISHING

*Sixpac Sonatas*, *Four Pack Ponies*, and *Graftings* forthcoming from C. F. Peters. *5 Sushiverticals* and *11 Sushihorizontals* published by Material Press, Berlin (<http://www.materialpress.com>). *Large Size Mograph 1962* published by BMI Canada. All other compositions are unpublished.

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