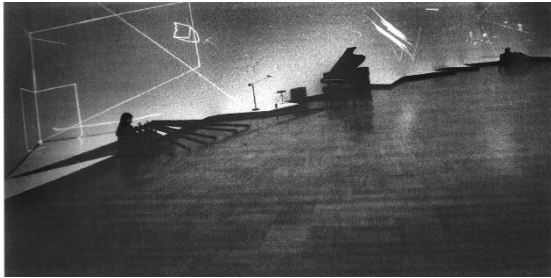




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(Richard Dunlap, *Intersphere* gallery shot, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1981)

Going Physical: Richard “Dick” Dunlap’s Solo Piano Work from 1981 SBMA *Intersphere* Show, Now Available on CD

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After its initial release of the acclaimed archival *Intersphere* album into the digital-spheres earlier in 2024, Richard “Dick” Dunlap has gone old-ish school, releasing the album on CD, on Household Ink Records. Veteran image man Ted Killian, the eye behind many Household Ink projects over the decades, did the CD design honors. The album rescues and resurrects profound sounds from 1981 – the improvised solo piano piece “Intersphere” b/w the hypnotic ambient piece “Fandance.”

In 1981, Dunlap, the multi-idiom, multi-adventurous musician/pianist, visual artist, sound artist and conceptualist, took charge of transforming the McCormick Gallery of the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. Visitors were welcomed into to the performance space creation known as *Intersphere*. The darkened gallery was illuminated by Dunlap’s linear projections on the walls, with an arrangement of tube-based instruments of his devising in one corner, and a baby grand piano in another.

In this wholly meditative and expansive atmosphere, visitors were treated to ambient envelopment but also musical performances – with his highly musical wife, Arlene. But the plan also featured a daily afternoon ritual in which, at 3 p.m. during the exhibition’s three-week run, Dunlap would freely improvise on piano. Once buried in a piano reverie, Dunlap was and is capable of seamlessly spanning areas of jazz, new music/minimalist turf, classical moves and modes of

(Richard “Dick” Dunlap, photo: Glen Casebeer Dunlap, 2024)



abstraction, woven into a poetic tapestry. Echoes of free-ranging solo work by Keith Jarrett and Paul Bley could be detected, but the fruits are ultimately and uniquely Dunlap-ian.

As Dunlap wrote, in a forward to an accompanying publication for the show: "This material represents a part of the process of the work coming together and my thinking as the work continues to develop." That description aptly describes the spontaneous and mutating form of the music itself, as it develops before our ears.

Fast forward 40+ years, and a recording of one such afternoon performance/invention, cleanly mastered by renowned new music engineer Scott Fraser, is finally being released into public earspace and digital circulation by Household Ink Records. This music stands the test of time and exceeds expectations and deserves to be heard.

Also included in the release is the transfixing contemplative 17-minute piece *Fandance*, for "electric fan, sound tubes and piano harp." It was recorded at Santa Barbara Sound, with Dan Protheroe as engineer, in 1984, as an echo of the setup in the transformed 1981 gallery space.

Dunlap returned to the scene of the sight-sound-space in SBMA in 2018, when his large construction *Summer Nocturne* was featured as the flagship image in the exhibition "Summer Nocturne: Works on Paper from the 1970s." Offering a short piano improvisation (on an upright piano this time) at the closing reception: Magic happened again, in shorter form.

With the release of *Intersphere* from the vaults, Dunlap steps back to move forward.



(Image: Richard Dunlap, piano improvisation at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 2018, photo: Joe Woodard)

About Richard Dunlap:

Intermedia artist Richard Dunlap was born in Seattle in 1939 and received an MFA in painting at the University of Washington in 1968. He taught in the Art Studio Department at UCSB from 1969 to 1977. Dunlap began performing visual/sound works early in the 1970s and has appeared in New York, Boston, Berlin, Stockholm, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and in Los Angeles and San Francisco. In his musical life, he has shared stages and developed alliances with Ralph Towner, David Friesen and Mal Waldron.

He was featured in a LIFE magazine story on sound artists. He has participated in New Music America festivals in San Francisco and Hartford. In Santa Barbara, Dunlap participated in the PULSE II exhibition at UCSB and the FLUXUS and Summer Nocturne exhibitions at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. He has received grants and awards including a Creative Arts Fellowship from the University of California, from the Bloom, W.M. Keck and Esperia Foundations, a Tiffany Award in Painting for music compositions from the Santa Barbara Arts Fund. He also released the self-reliant electro-acoustic album project Ode to the Sistrum in 1999.

He was also a critical part of the "hopelessly eclectic" Santa Barbara band Headless Household for 36 years, resulting in many live gigs and concerts, and nine feature-length albums on the Household Ink label.

Liner note by Josef Woodard

Now and Then: a Love Story

Richard “Dick” Dunlap, *Intersphere* solo piano recording, circa 1981 at SBMA

Because important and moving music knows no temporal bounds or expiration date of validity, Dick Dunlap’s solo piano adventure, flown in from his 1981 exhibition *Intersphere*, feels like now and forever. Paradoxically (or not), Dunlap’s freely-improvised 18-minute suite, a liquid amalgamation of jazz, new music, proto-ambient and other musical terrain, was very much plugged into the “here and now” specifics of its creation.

We can enjoy this alluring archival musical document partly thanks to Dunlap’s self-appointed “day job.” As part of the overall scheme for the multidisciplinary show in the Santa Barbara Museum of Art’s sizable McCormick Gallery, Dunlap—an accomplished and adventurous pianist on top of his work as visual/conceptual/sound artist--showed up for improvising duties at the gallery’s grand piano at 3:00 p.m. daily, during the show’s three-week run.

What transpired at the piano on those afternoons (and in a final evening performance) was strictly up to Dunlap and his wily muses. This sampling of that self-directed project, a typically varied and painterly landscape of musical impulses and probings, taps into the special zeitgeist of the artist’s then and now.

As Dunlap wrote, in a forward to an accompanying publication for the show: “This material represents a part of the process of the work coming together and my thinking as the work continues to develop.” That description aptly describes the spontaneous and mutating form of the music itself, as it develops before our ears.

Once buried in a piano reverie, Dunlap was and is capable of seamlessly spanning areas of jazz, new music/minimalist turf, classical moves and modes of abstraction, woven into a poetic tapestry. Echoes of free-ranging solo work by Keith Jarrett and Paul Bley could be detected, but the fruits are ultimately and uniquely Dunlap-ian. The structure of this piano adventure itself unfolds in diverse, microclimatic segments, from density into sparseness, harmonic clarity nuzzling dissonances, angularity against lyrical liquidity. The implied story settles, finally, into a deceptive resolution of minimalist pulsing, but with a surprise twist at the end, an air of suspension: a final question mark versus closure.

Also included in this release is the transfixing contemplative 17-minute piece *Fandance*, for “electric fan, sound tubes and piano harp” recorded at Santa Barbara Sound, with Dan Protheroe as engineer, in 1984, as an echo of the setup in the transformed 1981 gallery space.

My relationship with Dunlap, and specifically *Intersphere*, is hardly objective or detached. Through my work as a journalist/critic in realms of music, art and film, I had become fascinated with Dunlap’s artful synthesis of his chosen mediums--and especially his unique approach to piano and electronics. I interviewed and wrote about his internationally recognized work as a sound artist the Los Angeles *Reader* and was especially entranced by *Intersphere*, reviewing that show for the Santa Barbara *News & Review*.

With my musician garb on, imagine my surprise and protracted delight when Dunlap, in 1983, agreed to join forces with the trans-genre and often improvisatory group Headless Household, alongside myself (guitar, song-making), drummer Tom Lackner and bassist Chris Symer—plus numerous guests. Our alliance in that self-dubbed “hopelessly eclectic” band lasted 37 years and yielded nine albums worth of musical mischief.

Somewhere along the line, Dunlap gave me a cassette tape of a live *Intersphere* recording—this wondrous piano piece and a side B piece consisting of a later studio performance by himself and his highly musical wife Arlene on an array of sound-producing tubing and other odd implements in the gallery. During the neutral zone of the COVID hunker down, it seemed a propitious moment to dust off this piano entity, get it properly and sonically dressed up (much thanks to sensitive mastering engineer Scott Fraser), and send it out into the public ear space.

Listen up, soak in it, and enjoy safely. Or dangerously. Dunlap was/is on to something deep here.

~Josef Woodard, musician-writer at large

January 31, 2024

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