

# Merrin<sup>tes</sup> Music



## *Stephen Merriman Biography*

Stephen Merriman (b. 1946) grew up in Cambridge, Massachusetts and started piano at age seven. He was part of the very exciting music scene of the late '60s through the late '70s, working as a studio pianist and arranger in Boston and New York.

In Boston, Intermedia Sound (originally Petrucci & Atwell) at 331 Newbury Street was the premiere recording studio in the late '60s—the first to offer Ampex 2”-tape 16-track Dolby recording. Stephen did session work there with the likes of Maria Muldaur, Martin Mull (yes, really—Martin was an aspiring musician and staff producer at Petrucci & Atwell in those days), Nancy Michaels (whose album *First Impressions* was released on Warner/Reprise in January, 1969), Jeff (“Skunk”) Baxter (later of Steeley Dan), Paul McNeil (He put out an album called *Let It Rain*), David Grisman, Peter Rowan (many of these sessions were produced by John Nagy of Earth Opera fame), Livingston Taylor, the Batteau Brothers, Peter Johnson, and Carly Simon (the latter recorded and engineered by Eddie Kramer at Jimi Hendrix’s Electric Lady studio in New York during the fall of 1969).

Stephen also taught piano locally, numbering among his students Loudon Wainwright III and Livingston Taylor. He did some live performing, as well—as back-up pianist with Neil Sedaka (at the old Paul’s Mall nightclub in Boston), the comedian Pat Paulson (also at Paul’s Mall), the Batteau Brothers, Nancy Michaels, Joel Zoss, and Peter Johnson (who had an opening act spot for a memorable Van Morrison concert at Symphony Hall in about 1972).

In about 1970 Stephen paired up with reedman John Payne (who had worked with Van Morrison and David Bromberg) as “The Smallest Band in Town.” This ensemble-duo played mostly at the Club Casablanca in Cambridge, with a notable stint at the Jazz Workshop (*the Boston nightspot for jazz at the time*) in January 1971. He also recorded as part of a piano-percussion duo, first with David Humphries on conga drum, then Bob Fish on tabla. He rehearsed regularly with bassist John Neves, and the two had a memorable nightclub engagement which was broadcast live on WBUR-FM. He also served as piano accompanist to vocalist Amy Skolnick, and handled accompanist and arrangement duties for vocalists Susan Cartoun and Tanja Solnik. Locally, Stephen opened as a solo pianist for the likes of Blood, Sweat and Tears (at Paul’s Mall), Stan Getz (at Sandy’s in Beverly, Mass.), The Buddy Rich Big Band (also at Sandy’s), and the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Big Band (at the Performance Center, then the top floor of what is now The Garage, in Harvard Square).

In the mid-70s Stephen was a member of The New England Jazz Quartet (with Berklee veterans Mike Scott, tenor saxophone; Gil Graham, percussion; Larry Fishman, upright bass) and also headed the Merriman Trio (with Tim Wells and James Rubin sharing bass assignments), and Dan Morgan (a percussion major at B.U. School for the Arts) on drums. These two groups played college concerts and nightspots from New England south to North Carolina, and west to Michigan. They also appeared as featured performers on Public Television.

Stephen also cultivated a career as solo pianist-composer, which continues to this day. During the 1970s he played the college campus circuit, with occasional nightclub appearances, and was a frequent live radio performer on a number of FM stations, including Boston’s WHRB, WGBH, WERS and WBUR. Two LP’s of his solo piano work were recorded and released on Avon Hill Records: *In My Own Time* (1975) and *The Seasons: A Portrait of the Life Cycle* (1978). The recordings were both successful, the former being featured on international Voice of America short-wave broadcasts, and the latter being featured on Robert J. Lurtsema’s show, Morning Pro Musica, on WGBH and other NPR network affiliates on the morning of the winter solstice in 1978.

In May, 1980, during final exam week at Harvard (where he was completing a master’s degree in counseling), Stephen performed on 5 Live All Night hosted by Matt Siegel (at about 3AM!!). This was his last public performance for a number of years. Thereafter, Stephen embarked on a career

as counselor/ psychotherapist, (very) eventually earning a Ph.D. in Holistic Psychology at Columbia Pacific University. (He was nearly 50 years old when he finished it!) He has long-established psychotherapy practices in eastern and western Massachusetts, specializing in the treatment of addictions and dissociative disorders, as well as helping visual artists, and musicians, work constructively with their issues around creativity ([www.fourriverscounseling.com](http://www.fourriverscounseling.com)).

In the mid-1990s Stephen resurfaced publicly as a musician, playing out one night a week at a Harvard Square cafe called The Left Bank for about eighteen months. In 1997 he also played weekly at The Green Emporium, a fashionable dinner spot in Colrain, Mass.

From 2000-03 Stephen was active in a jazz quintet in western Mass. called The Illiterati which played together every couple of weeks and had a number of public performances over a period of three years.

Stephen remains musically active and ready to gig: have keyboard, will travel.....

He continues to play solo piano in various venues, and may explore working with a trio once again. In December 2005, while on a trip to Paris, he sat in at Le Baiser Salé, a redoubtable jazz club. More recently, in February 2006, Stephen performed as part of a duo with psychiatrist David Mann (calling themselves HeadCats) at the Zeitgeist Gallery in Cambridge, Mass. He currently plays a regular Sunday brunch gig at the legendary Club Passim, located in Harvard Square, Cambridge. He continues composing contemporary keyboard music drawing on jazz, classical, folk, gospel and rock influences.

Stephen has recently completed a CD of his piano music: *Modal Soul: Keyboard Jazz & Contemporary Piano for Contemplation & Delight*. This recording draws on compositions written between 1968 and 2006, and features lots of split keyboard playing, with the upright bass of the left hand holding down the harmonic structure and rhythmic pulse while the right hand improvises melodies and percussive chord sequences above it. The overall effect is a contrapuntal delight in which the whole is greater than the sum of its (very interesting) parts. *Modal Soul* is available through CDbaby.com, and downloadable through iTunes and other digital music download services.

In August, 2007 Stephen relocated to San Francisco! He is playing regularly at Café Euro, (Geary Blvd at 26th Avenue), and Simple Pleasures Café (3334 Balboa Street), both in the Outer Richmond district of San Francisco. He is available for performances in the San Francisco Bay Area, as well as in New England (which he visits regularly).

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