Morse Code Keeps the Beat

Five-time Grammy Award winning jazz composer and National Endowment of the Arts Jazz Master Maria Schneider has included a piece entitled, "CQ, CQ Is Anybody There?" on her forthcoming double album, "Data Lords."

Schneider finances her recordings through ArtistShare (artistshare.com), a kind of crowdfunding for musicians. Earlier this year I became a participant in the "Data Lords" project by paying up front for a 2-CD set of the finished album. As a participant, I have access to a series of videos Schneider filmed during the conception and realization of the project. In one of them, she held up a photo of her childhood homestead in rural Minnesota, mentioned her dad was a ham, and pointed out the two huge antenna towers that he built himself. I wrote her a short email, asking what her dad's call sign was. She responded almost immediately with "WØABF," and this started a fascinating exchange of emails.

I suggested that she slip some Morse Code into a piece as an homage to her dad. That idea took root and eventually blossomed into the number, "CQ, CQ Is Anybody There?" While Schneider was composing it, I sent her links to web-sites where she and her band members could type in words and hear them in Morse code.

This piece uses Morse code for all of its rhythms except for a recurring unison sax line in the second half. The opening is a search for connection, and the messages being transmitted start with "CQ," ham radio's customary call, asking if anybody is there.

Readers who would like to pre-order "Data Lords," which will be released in April 2020, can do so at artistshare.com.
— **Paul Schreier, AA1MI / HB9DST**

Five-time Grammy Award-winning composer and NEA Jazz Master Maria Schneider conducting her orchestra. [Dina Regine, photo]