

**MUSIC**

# Music in the key of love

Portland composer and musician Jeffrey Davis plays from the heart

BY ANDY MANGELS

Most couples have their favorite love song, a tune that recalls the time they met or a special time they shared together. But composer Jeffrey Davis wasn't content to share someone else's music with his life partner, David Dale, so he wrote his own.

In 1993, Davis and Dale had been together for a little less than two years when Dale was called away for a family obligation. Since Davis couldn't accompany him, he stayed at home and began to express his feelings about his partner in music.

"I sat down at the piano and played," he says, "just pouring out different feelings that I had. Something would come over me and it just flowed. Thinking of him, it worked."

Davis recorded his prolific session on a boom box and retooled it over the following days. His brother was the first to suggest a professional recording of the music, after originally thinking the audio tape was a performance by popular New Age artist Yanni.

Thanks to a friend at the Piedmont Presbyterian Church, Davis got access to a Kurzweil organ, an instrument that not only mimics the sound of a grand piano, but also includes orchestral replications of strings and flutes.

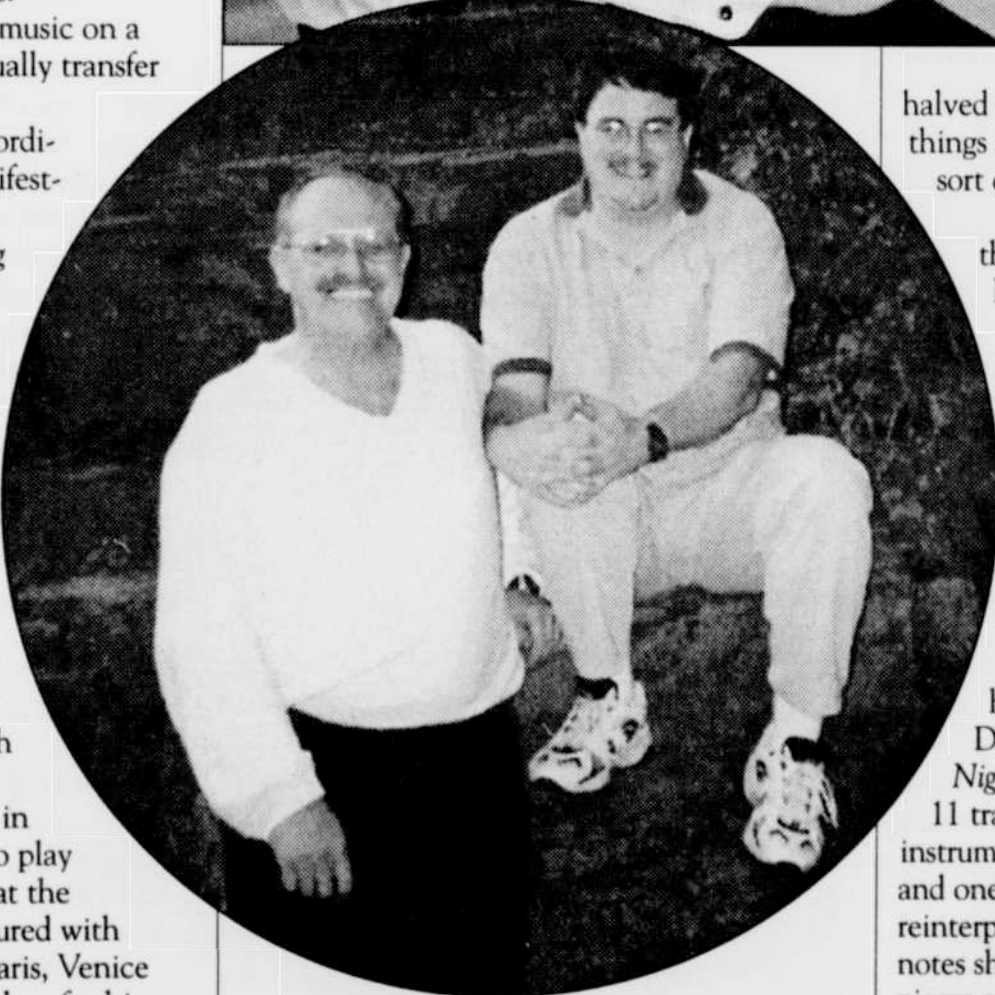
"They let me have a key so I could sit in there at night and play," he grins.

Davis was able to record the music on a computer floppy disk and eventually transfer it to CD in a recording studio.

The 36-year-old Davis' extraordinary talent at the keyboard manifested itself at an early age. Born in Auburn, Calif., he began playing piano at the age of 6—the same time he began discovering he liked boys much better than girls. Following a childhood injury and a brief coma, Davis became a prodigy of sorts—he could listen to a song on the radio and play it back almost perfectly, although he couldn't read music.

"I play by reading the chart chords with the left hand and embellishing everything else with the right hand," he admits.

While attending high school in Salem, Ore., Davis was chosen to play for America's Youth in Concert at the prestigious Carnegie Hall. He toured with that concert group in London, Paris, Venice and Rome before returning to Salem for his graduation. Shortly afterward, he moved to Portland, where he played special engagements for Meier & Frank and the Galleria. In 1985 he joined the Portland Gay Men's Chorus as



Top: Jeffrey Davis looking sharp while tickling the ivories; above: a more casual Davis (right) with his partner and inspiration, David Dale

both a singer and an accompanist.

When Davis met Dale, the man who would become his partner had been living with AIDS for seven years.

"When I first met David, I thought he was going to die tomorrow," Davis says soberly.

Then Davis was diagnosed as HIV-positive on his birthday in 1995.

"It was through time that it became easier to say, 'He's surviving, and there's another way that we can go,'" Davis explains.

At Davis and Dale's commitment ceremony, Dale's sister told them that "our problems are

halved when we're together, and the good things are doubled by being together. It's that sort of premise that we live with," says Dale.

He acknowledges that the music helps him survive: "His music has made me better and more well... I'm getting better and feel better than I have in years past."

In March 1999, Davis released the CD he had written for Dale, titled *A Little Night Music*. Ten of the 11 tracks are original instrumental compositions, and one tune is a standard reinterpreted. As the liner notes show, many of the pieces are for Dale, and the compositions range from classical pieces to ragtime to light jazz. One number is called "Rage & Remem-

brance," which is Davis' expression of the stages of dealing with life with AIDS.

"Through every one of these songs, I picture David," the pianist says. "These songs make me think of everything that has happened up till now, and everything that can happen from here on out. I'm very proud that there is a song called 'David' at the beginning and at the end. One does the past, and one does the future."

Davis and Dale have recently been exploring the idea of moving to the Hollywood area, where Davis would like to get involved in composing for film and television. He jokes that he might like to become "the next Vonda Shepherd," referring to *Ally McBeal's* ever-present chanteuse.

Meanwhile, he's planning a holiday CD and composing a commitment song and more music about survival.

"We'll see where the next step will take us," he says, his hand grasping the hand of his lover next to him.

■ *A Little Night Music* is available in Portland at Rainbows and Gai-Pied and in Salem at Corky's Daughter. You can order it by mail from Davis, 945 N.W. Naito Parkway, #323, Portland, OR 97209; from [Dpianoman69@aol.com](mailto:Dpianoman69@aol.com); or from (503) 973-5599. A portion of all proceeds goes to Esther's Pantry.

JEFFREY DAVIS will be performing at the dinner for the upcoming Beards & Roses Weekend sponsored by the Oregon Bears in early June, and he is available for private occasions and commitment ceremonies.

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Pianist

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