

# Odes / Codes: Max Allard

CD Review

7/26/22

CD: **Odes/Codes**

Artist: **Max Allard**

Artist Website: <https://maxallard.com/>



Chicago composer, banjoist, and multi-instrumentalist Max Allard released a new CD called ***Odes/Codes*** on January 21, 2022. This album consists mainly of introspective tunes composed during the 2020 Covid shutdown, which is a time that gave a reflective musician plenty of focus time to compose new music. And this album is reflective, introspective, and contemplative. Not fitting into any genre I can think of, I'll call ***Odes/Codes*** new acoustic music.

Can the banjo be beautiful? Some think not, but in the right hands, it certainly can. There is no driving three-finger

Scruggs style banjo here. There are no vocals. There are no two-and-a-half-minute breakdowns. There's pretty much nothing here that Jimmy Martin would like. As I have said in many different reviews, this sure ain't Bluegrass. There's just music to transport one to the place the composer envisions. I have always liked albums designed to listen to the whole thing as an experience; this is one of those albums.

There are fourteen instrumental tunes, all banjo compositions other than two guitars and one piano tune, all Allard originals except for a couple of covers. I usually list the names of the tunes, but fourteen names of new instrumental tunes may not reveal anything at all about the music. I'll just list my favorites.

Track 1, "Of The Morning," is a haunting unrushed melody, making me think of peaceful times in pleasant climes.

Track 8, "Hindsight," is a beautiful banjo tune with haunting melodies interspersed with a taste of dark tension. It is my favorite tune on the CD.

Track 9, "Oakland Drive," features Allard's guitar work. Allard declares the great Leo Kottke as one of his influences. You'll hear it if you're familiar with Kottke's work.

Track 13, "For Kaya," is a piano composition with space enough to insert yourself, walk around, and return. It is an unhurried stroll on a cool autumn evening. I can smell the wood smoke amid the gentle rustle of falling leaves.

It would be a mistake to think that the ten tunes I didn't name here were not enjoyable. They all were. And then there will be the inevitable comparisons of Allard's banjo work to that of Béla Fleck, and that is understandable. But I think that Fleck comparisons will be mostly because of all new music pushing the boundaries of the banjo. I have thoroughly enjoyed listening to the CD several times. It is not pretentious. It is what it is. And I am thankful for anyone who takes risks to

bring us new music.

Allard tells us that all the instruments featured on ***Odes/Codes*** were pitched at 450hz instead of the standard 440hz. There is no explanation anywhere I could find. I'd be interested in getting the artist's take on this. Why 450hz? Why not the more aesthetically appealing (or so we are told) 432hz? I'd sure like to hear more.

***Odes/Codes*** soothes as it entertains. I'd like to hear more from this musician.

Mississippi Chris Sharp