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GEORGE CRUMB AND MAKROKOSMOS, VOLUME 1

by

Jennelle Anderson

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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of

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George Crumb
and
Makrokosmos, Volume 1

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In the words of David Burge, "George Crumb provided his listeners with something of the sensation of awe, wonder, and enigmatic beauty that he himself felt concerning the 'mysteries.' He named movements after geological eras, referred to images as coming from 'the dark land,' invented visual symbols for his scores, and concocted numerological schemes. For many listeners these extra musical trappings provided an avenue into the music itself, allowing them to listen to it openly and with interest rather than with resistance and skepticism" (Burge, 1990, p. 212).

George Henry Crumb was born October 24, 1929 in Charleston, West Virginia to George and Vivian Crumb. He had one younger brother who played flute, but did not pursue a career in music. Charleston was a relatively small town of 50,000, and yet supported a symphony orchestra as well as the Mason College of Music and Fine Arts. The senior George Crumb was a free-lance musician who was engaged in a variety of musical activities. He was chiefly a clarinet player and played solos, performed in chamber music, and held the first clarinet seat in the Charleston Symphony Orchestra. He taught clarinet lessons through a music store as well as through Mason College. In addition to being the only music copyist in town, he conducted a silent theater orchestra and the Masonic Band. His wife Vivian was also a musician who played cello. She taught students in her home, played with the Charleston Symphony Orchestra, performed as a soloist, and performed with chamber music ensembles (Boroff, 1986).

Young George truly had a musical advantage growing up in this household. At a young age he learned to play the piano, and enjoyed performing with his parents in a trio.

He demonstrated unusual talent in his youth and worked hard to develop his musical gift by spending many hours studying his father's large collection of music scores. In high school George was student director of the orchestra and chamber ensembles. He was also chosen to participate in the All-State Orchestra where he played clarinet (Boroff, 1986).

George loved to compose, and made up his mind to be a composer. He entered Mason College in the fall of 1947 as a piano major, studying composition on his own, as this subject was not offered in this school. Also studying piano was Elizabeth Brown, who George dated and married at the end of their second year at college. George Crumb was 19 years old when he married (Boroff, 1986).

After completing just three years of study, Crumb graduated with his baccalaureate degree in 1950. The following summer was a difficult one for him. His father who he loved and admired, died. At age 20, with a baby on the way (a daughter), many important decisions lay ahead of George Crumb, and he felt a great responsibility to be a good provider for his family. He made the decision to follow in his father's footsteps. He taught, conducted a church choir, played the piano in a dance group, accompanied a ballet school, and took over his father's music copying business (Boroff, 1986).

In the fall of 1951, Crumb entered the University of Illinois and received his masters degree after two years. Upon graduating, he immediately moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan to study composition under Ross Lee Finney. He gained a deep appreciation for his teacher and remembers Finney instructing "that there is, after all, such a thing as the right note." Finney taught discipline, but did not interfere with style or musical personality. In

1959, Crumb received a Doctorate of Musical Arts in Composition. After graduation, the Crumb family moved to Boulder, Colorado to his first collegiate employer, The University of Colorado. While George was in Colorado, he became good friends with David Burge. *Five Pieces for Piano* was composed for him to perform. In 1964, Crumb took a professorship at the State University of New York. He was there only one year, before he took a position at the University of Pennsylvania as Professor of music and composer in residence. He was hired with expectations to teach two quarters and to compose the third quarter. Two sons were born (1964 and 1966) to make the family complete. The Crumbs currently reside in Pennsylvania, where George is still on the University of Pennsylvania faculty (Vinton, 1974).

George Crumb is accepted by many as a significant composer of the twentieth century. He has won almost every major award including Guggenheim, Fromm, Rockefeller, and Ford Foundation grants and commissions. He has won a Pulitzer Prize as well as a commission and grant from the National Institute of Arts and Letters (Sadie 1980).

George Crumb claims that the important influences in his life as a composer were his father, the senior George Crumb, and his teacher, Ross Lee Finney. Both taught discipline and commitment while letting George discover music internally, yielding a unique musical style and personality. Crumb claims to teach in the same indirect "low-key" manner (Boroff 1986).

Regarding his compositions, George Crumb states, "I suspect that the spiritual impulse of my music is more akin to the darker side of Chopin, and even the child-like

fantasy of early Schumann." His desire in composing is to "enlarge" the listeners' mind rather than to "astonish" them (Crumb 1972).

Crumb's greatest work for piano is Makrokosmos, Volume 1. This work was composed for his dear friend and colleague David Burge in 1972. It was his first solo piano work in over ten years. Many attempts had been made by the composer to create a solo piano work, but the efforts were aborted when other compositions took precedence. With maturity and experience came the ability to compose this masterpiece (Crumb 1972).

Makrokosmos is composed in a new idiom of conventional and unconventional piano playing. This technique includes playing both on the keys as well as inside the piano on the strings themselves. David Burge, who recorded the work, states that "the pianist is required not only to play in and out of the piano, but also must whistle, sing, shout, and whisper in various specified ways. Singing is always notated in the bass clef only because the work is dedicated to a man, but women may transpose the pitches up an octave. Whistling is notated at exact pitch. The whistling requirements are demanding and will need practice over an extended period of time to develop range, breath control, and precise intonation in order to achieve an accurate and effective performance" (Burge, 1990).

Another name given to Makrokosmos, Volume 1 is "Twelve Fantasy Pieces after the Zodiac for Amplified Piano" (Berkowitz 1975). The work is a set of twelve pieces of which each is named after a sign of the zodiac. Makrokosmos is a spatial concept of nighttime, the stars, and the heavens. The external influences for this work are Bela

Bartok, Claude Debussy and Johann Sebastian Bach. The name of Makrokosmos was a result of inspiration from Bartok's work Mikrokosmos. Mikrokosmos is very different, and only the name gave inspiration. Debussy's 24 preludes, as well as Bach's 24 preludes and fugues inspired Crumb to choose the total number of pieces written between Makrokosmos, Volume 1 and Makrokosmos, Volume 2 (12 pieces in each volume). The scores are published in his beautiful, clear style of calligraphy. The notation is exact, with every detail clearly defined. The internal musical influences for Makrokosmos, Volume 1 come from Frederic Chopin, Federico Garcia Lorca, and Robert Schumann. Chopin's music is graceful, sensitive, expressive, and romantic, with extremely lyrical melodies that capture a sentimental atmosphere. The poetry of Lorca is full of dark images, and his ideas greatly matched those of George Crumb. Many of Crumb's vocal works are set to the text of Lorca's words. Schumann's music is very programmatic, and most of his works are character pieces, arranged in sets or cycles. He enjoyed giving himself and many of his associates descriptive names, writing a piece that would center on a character's personality, and then telling a musical story using these characters. Crumb also enjoys adding interest and character to his pieces by using symbols, initials, and enigmas in his score (Burge, 1990).

In Makrokosmos, Volume 1, the twelve pieces are divided into three parts:

- Part I
1. Primeval Sounds (Genesis 1) *Cancer*
 2. Proteus *Pisces*
 3. Pastorale (from the Kingdom of Atlantis, ca. 10,000 B.C.) *Taurus*
 4. Crucifixus [SYMBOL] *Capricorn*
- Part II
5. The Phantom Gondolier *Scorpio*
 6. Night-Spell I *Sagittarius*
 7. Music of Shadows (for Aeolian Harp) *Libra*
 8. The Magic Circle of Infinity (moto Perpetuo) [SYMBOL] *Leo*

- Part III 9. The Abyss of Time *Virgo*
 10. Spring-Fire *Aries*
 11. Dream Images (Love-Death Music) *Gemini*
 12. Spiral Galaxy [SYMBOL] *Aquarius*

The last piece of each part is composed in the shape of the title; for example, a cross for *Crucifixus*, a circle for *The Magic Circle of Infinity*, and a spiral for *Spiral Galaxy*. All the pieces are marked *attaca*, except numbers 4, 8, and 12. This means each of the parts is to be played continuously as one movement to the next without pause. Each piece is also marked in brackets with some person's initials and an enigma. This information represented an individual born under that zodiac sign. The initials for number 4, 5, and 19 are RLF, GHC, and DB, representing Ross Lee Finney, George Henry Crumb (himself), and David Burge, to whom the work is dedicated (Crumb, 1972).

The shape of each group is similar in that it starts out slow, then energetic, then tranquil, and then slow again. The shape of each grouping is ABCA. This is evident, especially in Crumb's use of similar material in pieces 1, 4, 9, and 12. The scheme is:

- Part I 1. Darkly mysterious
 2. Very fast; whimsical, volatile
 3. Moderately, with incisive rhythm
 4. Darkly mysterious
- Part II 5. Eerily, with a sense of malignant evil
 6. Poised, expectantly
 7. Gracefully, with elastic rhythm
 8. Joyously, like a cosmic clock-work; with mechanically precise rhythm
- Part III 9. Dark, with a sense of profound mystery
 10. Prestissimo; breathlessly, with elan
 11. Musingly, like the gentle caress of a faintly remembered music
 12. Vast, lonely, timeless

The pieces are carefully written with consideration given to color, dynamic control, idiomatic effects, repetition, and contrasts. Some important performance notes are necessary to play the work correctly (see appendix).

One impressively crafted piece in this work is *Dream Images*, which is #11. It is called "Love Death Music", *Gemini*. The performer is told the piece is to be played "musingly, like the gentle caress of faintly remembered music (flexible and expressive)." The piece is made up of three layers, a treble, a bass, and a middle layer (Boroff, 1986). It begins with the bass alternating B and F-sharp major triads. The treble centers around an A with patterns F-G-A and E-G-A used many times throughout the piece. Tritones, cluster patterns, and whole tone scales are used extensively in this piece. The middle layer contains three quotations from Chopin's *Fantasia-Impromptu*. The first Chopin excerpt comes in for five measures, and is clearly in D-flat major with 4/4 meter time. The Chopin excerpt fades out when the original bass and treble statements interrupt the Chopin thought. Two more Chopin excerpts are heard throughout the piece: the second is four measures long and the third, two measures in length. The climax of the piece appears directly after the second Chopin excerpt. The performer is directed to play a glissando on the strings at this time. This is the only unconventional piano technique used in this piece other than the use of a microphone over the bass strings. The piece ends with two loud stinging sounds. The listener and the performer are jolted with this instruction given by the composer. The beautiful music then seems to drift away into nothingness. Specific instructions are given throughout the piece, and although the

piece is only 5 lines long, every phrase is marked with instructions such as pedaling, dynamic control, tempo, pauses, and descriptive words to bring out the feel of the piece. Words used include: "pale," "fragile," "wistfully," "elegant," "animated," "timidly," "crystally," "languidly," and "as from afar." Barlines, meter, and key are not used with the exception of the Chopin quotations. The piece flows and feels perfectly natural without these traditional music notations. The work is well thought out and exquisitely written. George Crumb's goal not to shock, but to enlarge the listener by illustrating old ideas in new ways, is surely accomplished in this work (Crumb, 1972).

Childhood experience in performing with his parents, and access to a unique collection of great musical literature, prepared this composer to make an impact in the world of music. His music has its own unique quality, full of imagination and realized fantasy. Everything is notated beautifully and clearly, and there is no mistaking how he wants his music interpreted. Through Makrokosmos, Volume 1, Crumb has truly "provided his listeners with something of the sensation of awe, wonder and enigmatic beauty that he himself felt concerning the 'mysteries' " (Burge, 1990).

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





Appendix

The following performance notes must be understood to perform Makrokosmos, Volume 1 correctly.

1. Larger accidentals apply to all notes in a grouping.

b # ♯

2. Metronome indications are approximate.
3. The performer is required to mark the strings inside the piano with bits of tape. The pitches should be labeled. This is to aid the performer in finding the strings quickly, as many of the pieces require string playing.
4. There are two marked ways of pizzicato playing. "pizz. (f.t.)" directs the player to pluck the string towards the center, with the fingertip. "pizz. (f.n.)" indicates that the fingernail is to be used to pluck the string near the pins..
5. Glissandos over the strings are played using the fingertip (f.t.) or the thumbnail (t.n.).
6. Mart. (f.t.) requires the performer to dampen the vibrating string (near the end of the string) with the fingertip.
7. **+** directs the performer to mute the string (near the end) with the fingertip.
8. **○** signals the performer to dampen the vibrating string with the fingertip.
9. A light metal chain is needed for *Primeval Sounds*. The chain should be taped to the end of the metal frame of the piano, and can be hooked around a tuning pin when not in use.
10. Two thimbles are used to scrape or strike the strings in *Phantom Gondolier*.
11. A regular paper clip can be used for the "metal plectrum" required in *The Abyss of Time*.
12. PI indicates the right (damper) pedal to be used.
13. PII indicates the middle (sostenuto) pedal to be used.

14. PIII indicates the left (una corda) pedal to be used.
15. N.B. PI. sempre requires the performer to keep the damper pedal down continuously.
16. Notes enclosed in a box are to be silently depressed.
17. The pianist is required to sing certain passages in *Phantom Gondolier*.
18. There are passages to be whistled in *Night-Spell*.
19. A microphone should be placed above the bass strings to amplify the piano.
20.  is seven seconds.
21.  is three seconds.
22.  is five seconds.
23.  is a long pause.
24.  is a short pause.
25.  is a very short pause.
26. **FI** is a long fermata.