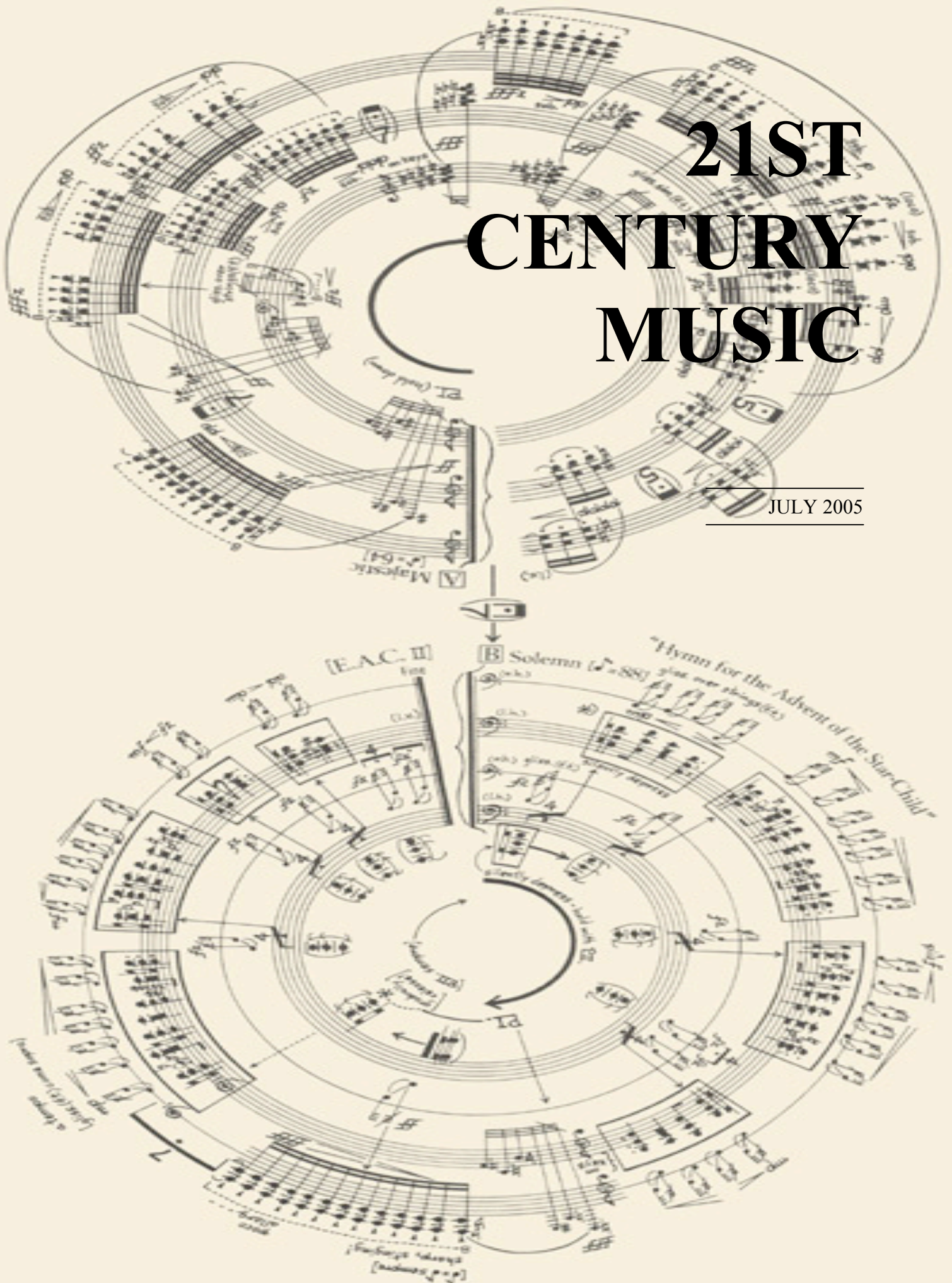


21ST CENTURY MUSIC

JULY 2005



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21ST CENTURY MUSIC

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The Compleat Crumb / To 1970 and Beyond

MARK ALBURGER

Bridge Records is ongoing with their heroic *Complete Crumb Edition*.

Here's what they're up against (George Crumb's output to date, over an almost Elliot Carteresque stretch of six decades)...

...and here's how they're doing, with comments on selected 1970 work and beyond, concluding a discussion begun in the June 2005 issue.

1940

Two Duos (c. 1944), for flute and clarinet

Four Pieces (1945), for violin and piano

Four Songs (1945), for voice, clarinet, and piano

Piano Sonata (1945)



Three Early Songs (1947), for voice and piano

Volume 3
Ann Crumb, Voice
George Crumb, Piano

Seven Songs (1946), for voice and piano

Gethsemane (1947), for small orchestra

Alleluja (1948), for unaccompanied chorus

Violin Sonata (1949)



1950

A Cycle of Greek Lyrics (c. 1950), for voice and piano

Prelude and Toccata (1951), for piano

String Trio (1952)

Three Pastoral Pieces (1952), for oboe and piano

Viola Sonata (1953)

String Quartet (1954)

Diptych (1955)

Sonata for Solo Cello (1955)

Variazioni (1959), for large orchestra



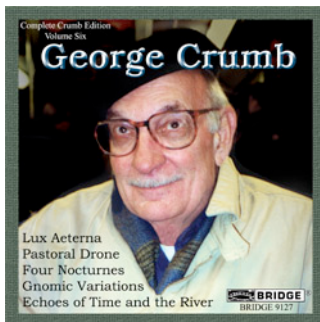
1960

Five Pieces (1962), for piano



Night Music I (1963, revised 1976), for soprano, piano/celeste, and two percussionists

Volume 2
Susan Narucki, Soprano
Christopher Oldfather, Piano and Celesta
Daniel Druckman and James Baker, Percussion



Four Nocturnes (Night Music II) (1964), for violin and piano

Volume 6
Gregory Fulkerson, Violin
Robert Shannon, Piano

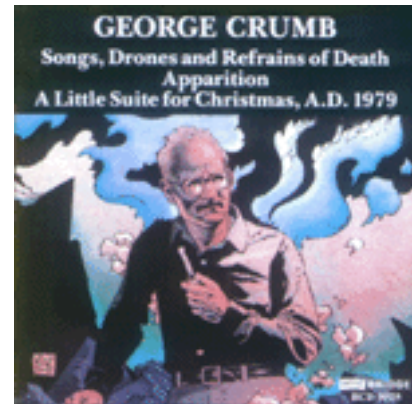
Eleven Echoes of Autumn (Echoes I) (1966), for violin, alto flute, clarinet, and piano

Madrigals, Book I (1965), for soprano, vibraphone, and double bass

Madrigals, Book II (1965), for soprano, flute/alto flute/piccolo, and percussion

Echoes of Time and the River (Echoes II) (1967)

Volume 6
Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra; Thomas Conlin, Conductor



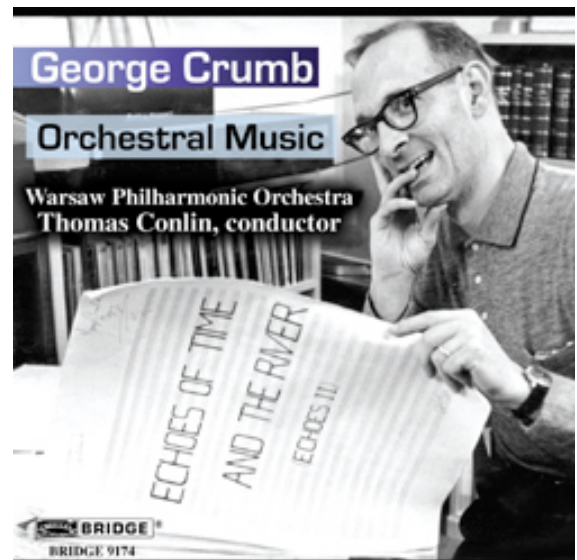
Songs, Drones, and Refrains of Death (1968), for baritone, electric guitar, electric double bass, amplified piano/electric harpsichord, and two percussionists

Volume 1
David Starobin, Electric Guitar
Donald Palma, Electric Contrabass
Aleck Karis, Electric Piano / Electric Harpsichord
Daniel Druckman and; Eric Charlston, Percussion

Madrigals, Book III (1969), for soprano, harp, and percussion

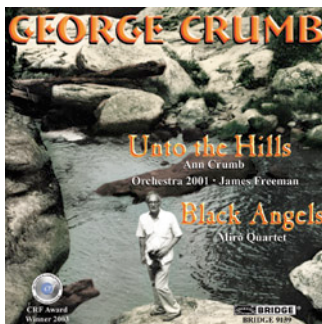
Madrigals, Book IV (1969), for soprano, flute/alto flute/piccolo, harp, double bass, and percussion

Night of the Four Moons (1969), for alto, alto flute/piccolo, banjo, electric cello, and percussion



1970

Ancient Voices of Children (1970), for mezzo-soprano, boy soprano, oboe, mandolin, harp, amplified piano (and toy piano), and percussion (three players)



Black Angels (Images I) (1970), for electric string quartet

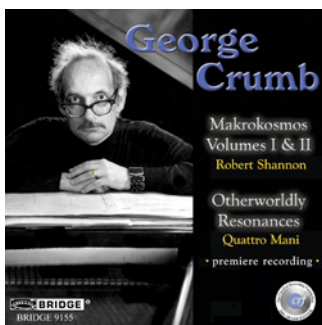
Volume 7
The Miro Quartet

Up against classic recordings of *Black Angels* by such quartets as the New York and Kronos, the Miro holds its own in a dangerous and energetic reading among the best.

Lux Aeterna (1971) for soprano, bass flute/soprano recorder, sitar, and percussion (two players)

Volume 6
Jan DeGaetani, Mezzo-Soprano
Penn Contemporary Players
Richard Wernick, conductor

Vox Balaenae (Voice of the Whale) (1971), for electric flute, electric cello, and amplified piano



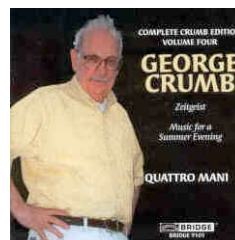
Makrokosmos, Volume I (1972), for amplified piano

Volume 8
Robert Shannon, Piano

Makrokosmos, Volume II (1973), for amplified piano

Volume 8
Robert Shannon, Piano

Here, Robert Shannon is up against the premiere recordings by David Burge (Volume 1, Nonesuch) and Robert Miller (Volume 2, Columbia), as well as Laurie Hudicek's through-line on the works as found on the Furious Artisans label. Shannon provides the menace pianistically and vocally in thoughtful renditions that extend a tradition.

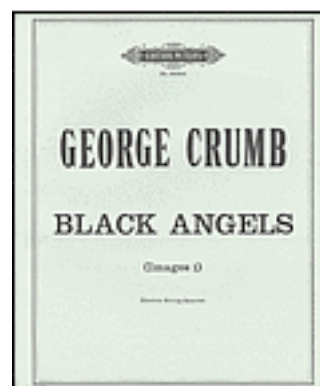


Music for a Summer Evening (Makrokosmos III) (1974), for two amplified pianos and percussion (two players)

Volume 4
Susan Grace and Ann Ryback, Pianos
John Kinzie and David Colson, Percussion

While second performances of works (let alone second and third recordings, etc.) have been few and far between for some composers, such has not been the case for Crumb, as we now again find ourselves comparing a Complete Works recording to an older record/CD, in this case the Kalish-Freeman-DesRoches-Fitz *Music for a Summer Evening* to the current Grace-Ryback-Kinzie-Colson take. And again, while comparisons are odious, they are respectable here, with the requisite mystery and shock as required.

Dream Sequence (Images II) (1976), for violin, cello, piano, percussion (one player), and off-stage glass harmonica (two players)



Star-Child (1977, revised 1979), for soprano, antiphonal children's voices, male speaking choir, bell ringers, and large orchestra

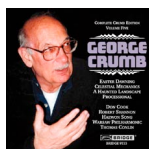
Volume 3
The Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra
Susan Narucki, Soprano
Joseph Alessi, Trombone
The Warsaw Boys' Choir
The Warsaw Philharmonic Choir
George Crumb and Paul Cesarczyk, Bell Ringers
Thomas Conlin, Conductor

With this Bridge Records release, *Star-Child* receives its premiere recording (surprisingly untouted as such) and sounds every bit as overwhelming as it did in live concerts in New York and Philadelphia back in 1977.

Apparition (1979), for soprano and amplified piano

Volume 1
Jan DeGaetani, Mezzo-Soprano
Gilbert Kalish, Amplified Piano

The stark surreal simplicity of *Apparition* is still apparent in this re-issue from Bridge 9006, Recorded in Octor 1982, at the Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, New York, NY (a disc that also included songs of Charles Ives). Crumb's first English setting in many a year, after many Spanish (Federico Garcia Lorca) ones, the music remains an ear-opener, giving texts by Walt Whiman a decidedly Iberian echoic flare.



Celestial Mechanics (Makrokosmos IV) (1979), for amplified piano (four hands)

Volume 5
Haewon Song and Robert Shannon, Pianos

This performance of *Celestial Mechanics* marks a fifth recorded release of the work, and surprisingly unacknowledged on the official George Crumb website (georgecrumb.net). With this piece, the composer seems to have arrived with all of the stylistic traits well in place that would mark his output in the next two decades, argued ably by dueting pianists Song and Shannon.

1980

A Little Suite for Christmas, A.D. 1979 (1980)

Volume 1
Lambert Orkis, Piano

Related to *Apparition*, this is again a Bridge re-release from 1982 (in this case from August of that year, recorded at Bradley Hills Church, Bethesda, MD, paired with Richard Wernick's *Sonata for Piano* ["*Reflections of a Dark Light*"]). Not surprisingly, not exactly traditional Christmas music, but Orkis has the traditional Crumb *modi operandi* well in hand.

Gnomic Variations (1981)

Volume 6
Robert Shannon, piano

String Trio (1982)

Pastoral Drone (1982), for organ

Volume 6
Gregory D'Agostino, organ

Processional (1983)

Volume 5
Robert Shannon, Piano

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of *Processional* is its limiting itself to the piano keyboard itself, after so many years of Crumb's inside-the-piano-work. As such, it almost comes off as an early work, and the composer should be applauded for at least exploring a new (albeit old) angle, as well delivered by Shannon here in the composition's sixth (and again unacknowledged on the official website) recording.

A Haunted Landscape (1984)

Volume 5
The Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra
Thomas Conlin, Conductor

By this point, one has the sense that the official George Crumb website has not been updated in quite some time, as this the second recording of *A Haunted Landscape* is again unacknowledged. It should be, as this performance by The Warsaw Philharmonic, under Thomas Conlin, is a fine one in the path set by the premiere rendition of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Arthur Weisberg (New World Records, paired with William Schuman's *Three Colloquies for Horn and Orchestra*). Crumb's first orchestral work since *Star-Child* and first exclusively large-scale-instrumental after *Echoes of Time and the River*, this is on a decidedly smaller scale that still manifests a bit of Edgar Varesian and post-tonal-Igor-Stravinskian brusquerie, and even hints of Gyorgy Ligetian clusterie.

The Sleeper (1984), for soprano and piano

Federico's Little Songs for Children (1986), for soprano, flute/piccolo/alto flute/bass flute, and harp

Volume 2
Susan Narucki, Soprano
Susan Palma Nidel, Flutes
Stacey Shames, Harp

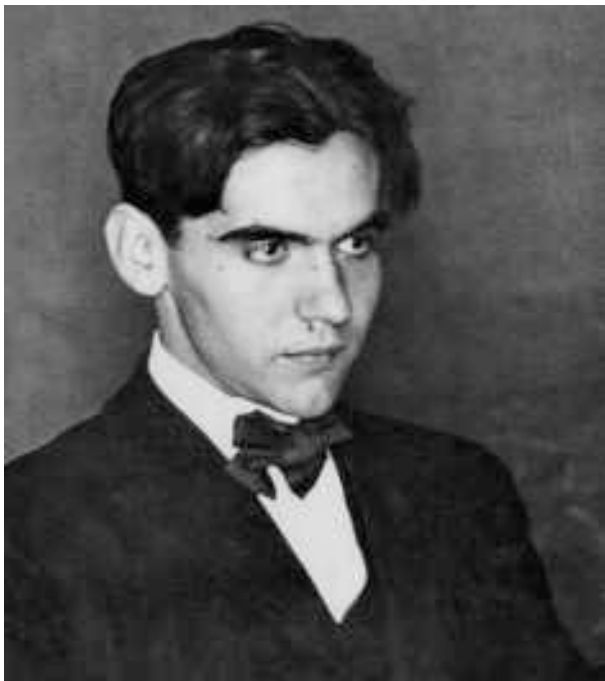
Federico's Little Songs for Children is right on up there on the list of who-exactly-are-we-marketing-this-to pieces with *A Little Suite for Christmas*. Again, unsurprisingly, this is decidedly not kid stuff, but echoes of quintessential Crumb in a delightful premiere recording of a work, by now also recorded with the Jubal Trio on CRI (a disc also featuring Don Freund's *Backyard Songs*, Harvey Sollberger's *Life Study*, Tania Leon's *Journey*, and the Eric Stokes [is it a song cycle?] *Song Circle*).

An Idyll for the Misbegotten (Images III) (1986), for amplified flute and percussion (three players)

Zeitgeist (Tableaux Vivants) (1988), for two amplified pianos

Volume 4
Susan Grace and Ann Ryback, Pianos

Zeitgeist (Tableaux Vivants) has all its tricks in place, turned sprightly by duo pianists Susan Grace and Ann Ryback, in this its second recording, first laid to electronic replay on Mode Records by the Degenhardt-Kent Duo, simply billed as *Six Tableaux* embedded with *Makrokosmos IV* and Earle Brown's *Corroboree*.



1990

Easter Dawning (1991), for carillon

Volume 5
Don Cook, Carillon

Since premiere and second recordings can be so hard to obtain for some composers, we get both here (not yet on the crumbsite), with Don Cook's carillonning bookending the Complete Works, Volume 5. While the second performance is more leisured (or simply has more silence at the front end) and the first checks in as longer (or merely mostly prolonged resonance at the conclusion -- booklet durations of 4:06 and 4:07 are in reality 4:17 and 4:07), the realizations are remarkably similar, which the current writer will demonstrate on June 5, 2008, as part of his *Genre Implosions No. 2* ("*Alphabetic Homage*") (markalburgerworks.blogspot.com).

Quest (1994), for guitar, soprano saxophone, harp, double bass, and percussion (two players)

Volume 2
David Starobin, Guitar and Concertina
Donald Sinta, Soprano Saxophone
Karen Lindquist, Harp
Donald Palma, Contrabass
Daniel Druckman and Erik Charlston, Percussion
William Purvis, Conductor

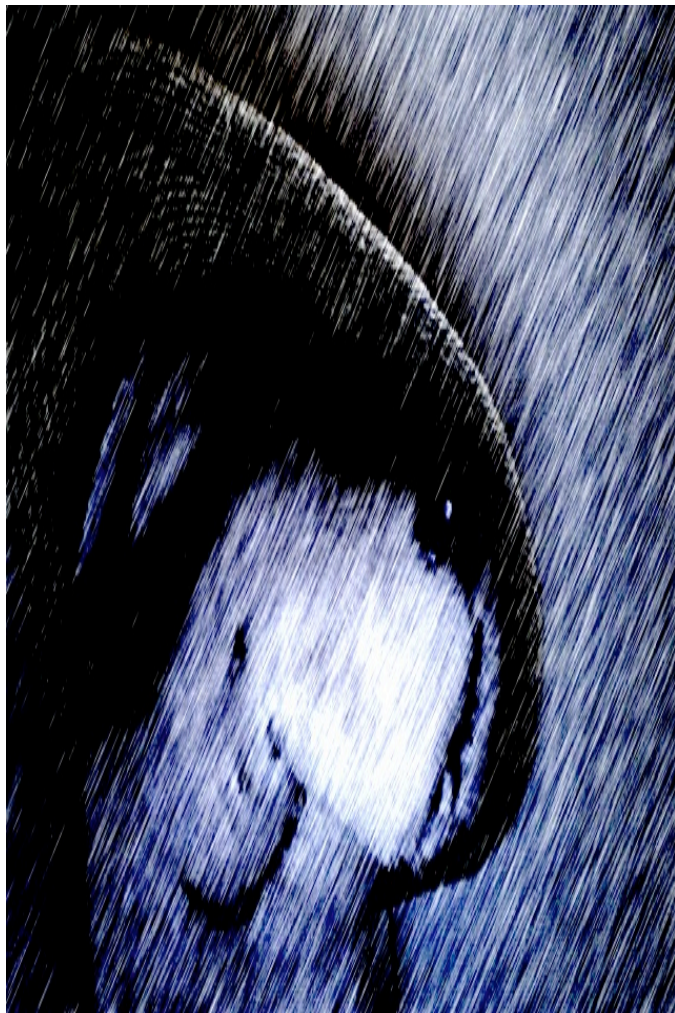
In *Quest*, we come to Crumb's first use of guitar since *Songs, Drones, and Refrains of Death* and apparently first use of acoustic apparently ever, the instrument in the earlier being electric, and for guitarist/record-producer David Starobin this work may be the touchstone of the entire Crumb project, being the guitarist's first Crumb commission and placed on the second album, appropriately acknowledged as a premiere release (tellingly, *Songs, Drones* is the first selection on the first album). Starobin, no stranger to the music, having played all of Crumb's plucked string repertory at some point thus far (banjo for *Night of the Four Moons*, mandolin on *Ancient Voices of Children*, and sitar in *Lux Aeterna*), gives us -- how can we say otherwise -- the definitive performance, with both familiar and novel contributions from saxophone, harp, percussion, and string bass -- which has by now been re-released as part of Starobin's *Guitar Concertante*, with Poul Ruders's *Psalmodes* and John Anthony Lennon's *Zingari*. Like *A Little Suite for Christmas*, this music features a very familiar quotation (in this case *Amazing Grace*)... far better known to a general public than most previous found musics, seemingly pointing Crumb toward his recent interests in folk-song settings.

Mundus Canis (A Dog's World) (1998), for guitar and percussion

Volume 3

David Starobin, Guitar; George Crumb, Percussion

Mundus Canis becomes an "in-house" project, not only with respect to subject matter (the Crumb family's pet dogs over several decades), but in terms of performance, with Starobin and the composer going it alone, and Crumb's first major performance (percussion here and piano in *Three Early Songs* on the same album) of his own work (discounting the unacknowledged Crumbian groans heard in the *Myth* movement of the Kalish-Freeman-DesRoches-Fitz *Music for a Summer Evening*). What can we say? Crumb and Starobin own the piece, in what remains its sole recording, exemplifying at times the humorous side of the composer often experienced in life but more rarely in the recordings. The Yoda movement is downright hilarious, whether live or in the studio.



2000

Otherworldly Resonances (2003), for two pianos

Volume 8

Quattro Mani (Susan Grace and Alice Rybak, Pianos)

By the single-movement piano-duet *Otherworldly Resonances*, Susan Grace and Alice Rhybak effectively demonstrate that Crumb quite obviously has a style definitively his own, and of a certain consistency over the decades that seems downright classical. Yet paradoxically at least one new element will jump to the fore soon after this reliably-standard take.

Unto the Hills (American Songbook I) (2002), for soprano, percussion quartet and piano

Volume 7

Ann Crumb, Soprano
Orchestra 2001; James Freeman, Conductor

The new recent direction of George Crumb -- as heard in this excellent premiere recording by soprano Ann Crumb and Orchestra 2001, conducted by James Freeman -- is taking those found-music quotes of the earlier works and moving them to the foreground in *Unto The Hills (American Songbook I)*. With Ann's beautiful vernacular singing of known songs, the settings almost come off as a parody of Crumb. Almost, but not quite, as the composer still manages to bring amazing mystery to what once was safely familiar. In some surprising analog to Philip Glass's varied use of various world musics, there is something so elemental about what both composers do (in their markedly distinct ways, of course) that other inspirations can be incorporated with ease. And as to the present recording and the previous ones, we look for more wonders in this impressive undertaking from Bridge Records.

Eine Kleine Mitternachtmusik (A Little Midnight Music) (2002)

A Journey Beyond Time (American Songbook II) (2003), for soprano, percussion quartet and piano

River of Life (American Songbook III) (2003), for soprano, percussion quartet and piano

Winds of Destiny (American Songbook IV) (2004), for soprano, percussion quartet and piano

Chronicle

May 3

Royal Opera presents the premiere of Lorin Maazel's 1984 (after George Orwell). Covent Garden, London, UK. "If Lorin Maazel's opera 1984 were a brilliant work with a real shot at a future, few people would care that he put a great deal of his own money into the production that opened on Tuesday night at the Royal Opera, Covent Garden. Unfortunately, though there are some compelling elements to 1984 and the creators received a fairly rousing ovation by the expectant audience, the opera is hampered by Mr. Maazel's undistinguished score. The music is never less than thoroughly professional. But Mr. Maazel lacks a personal voice as a composer. What constitutes a compositional voice is hard to define. But you know it when you hear it. Stories of dissension within the Royal Opera over the company's involvement with "1984" have been reported as breaking news in London newspapers in recent days. But Mr. Maazel made no secret of his personal backing of this production. As he explained in an interview with The New York Times that appeared in February, he formed a company, Big Brother Productions, to present this premiere and then, he hoped, to take it on the road. A recent article in The Guardian of London stated that Mr. Maazel had contributed more than \$760,000 to the project, almost half of the production costs. . . . The question of the moment, though, is: How good is Mr. Maazel's opera? . . . [O]nly intermittently does Mr. Maazel's music hold its own in the face of Orwell's issues and the harrowing events depicted on stage. A towering musician, Mr. Maazel has conducted and absorbed most of the major works of the orchestral and operatic repertory. He boasts a comprehensive knowledge of the styles and techniques of 20th-century music, all of which he can evoke and manipulate. But his facility is actually the problem, something that becomes apparent in the opening scene. Workers are assembled at the Ministry of Truth for a routine Hate Session, in which they denounce the enemies of Oceania, their territory, which is always under siege, or so they are told. The music erupts and shrieks with slashing, aggressively modern chaos. You think of fiercely dissonant works like Varèse's radical 1921 *Amérique*, a score that Mr. Maazel has conducted stunningly. It's not that he explicitly mimics Varèse or any other 20th-century composer. But throughout the opera you hear fleeting suggestions of Ligeti's textures, Berg's atonal language, Messiaen's rapturous colors, Berio's harmonically wayward lyricism, even 1940's big band jazz spiked with 12-tone elements. In one extended crowd scene, as frenzied throngs await a routine public execution, Mr. Maazel gives us an Ivesian collage of styles, though with a self-consciously bitter twist: children reciting nasty nursery rhymes, a vocal quartet singing a sentimental love ballad, a vehement cadre of women from the Anti-Sex League and more. Mr. Maazel's penchant for alternating lyrical writing for the voice with sputtered words grows predictable. Several roles demand acrobatic exploits in the vocal stratosphere. If such hellishly difficult vocal writing is meant to evoke Orwellian despair, it comes across as Mr. Maazel's attempt to prove that 1984 is a tough new work that pushes at the extremes. The writing for orchestra is, of course, masterly. Mr. Maazel knows how to

make sustained string chords shimmer. There is an affecting episode when each note of Winston's brooding vocal line is hugged by a pungently chromatic orchestra chord, rich with strings, while an unstable bass line moves stealthily in the murky undertow. Moments like these hint at a potentially striking compositional voice. But Mr. Maazel has not spent the requisite years that gifted composers, starting in their youth, devote to honing their personal voice. And he composed this ambitious score in roughly three years, starting in late 2001. During this period, as New Yorkers know, he did not exactly have a lot of free time. . . . For all its mix of vehemence and languor, the music too often seems merely supportive of the stage drama, like a modernistic film score. Paradoxically, Mr. Maazel's music is overwhelmed by the powerful production that he subsidized, the work of the Canadian director Robert Lepage, who was involved with this project from the inception. . . . The admirable cast was headed by the superb British baritone Simon Keenlyside as Winston. An elegant and hardy singer, Mr. Keenlyside again proved himself a risk-taking actor - the Ralph Fiennes of baritones. . . . The rich-voiced soprano Nancy Gustafson was a sympathetic Julia, a plucky soul who dares to express her longing to Winston. The tenor Richard Margison used his burnished voice to convey the blithe cruelty of O'Brien. . . . With Mr. Maazel conducting, the orchestra tore into the score with abandon. But too often the music to 1984 seemed a collection of savvy orchestral effects" [Anthony Tommasini, The New York Times, 5/4/08].

"A wealthy dilettante pays a publishing house to issue the novel he has written: a classic example of a vanity project. But suppose a wealthy man who happens to be a gifted writer subsidizes the publication of his book. Is this project any less vain because the novel is worthy? Consider this case. Was Michael R. Bloomberg's successful bid to become mayor of New York in 2001 any less valid because he financed it himself, to the tune of almost \$70 million? You have to wonder whether the Republican Party would have embraced this former Democrat if he had not pledged to pick up the tab for his campaign. Recently the subject of vanity productions has consumed the world of international opera. . . . Mr. Maazel, the music director of the New York Philharmonic and a world-renowned conductor -- but a composer of scant reputation with a limited catalog of works -- put much of his own money into the production. He made no secret of this. As he explained in a February interview in The New York Times, he had set up his own company, Big Brother Productions, to finance the opera's premiere and take the production to other houses. . . . [A]n article in The Guardian on May 2 stated that Mr. Maazel had contributed more than \$760,000 to the project, almost half the production costs. Other sources reported that he had waived his conducting fee for the six-performance run of the work. . . . He also spared Covent Garden the hassle of building sets in its own shops by having the scenery constructed in Canada under the supervision of the production's eminent director, Robert Lepage. Though brilliantly orchestrated and never less than professionally conceived, Mr. Maazel's music, like a modernistic film score, takes a back seat to the stage drama and to Orwell's vision.

You sense a composer drawing on his comprehensive knowledge of music from Berg to Bernstein, awkwardly searching for an original voice. . . . The Royal Opera must be shaken by the reviews in the London papers, which have ranged from tepid ("not as awful as some feared") to witty ("a cleverly concocted piece of operatic fast-food") to vitriolic (a 'long schlocky horror show'). Whatever one's take on Mr. Maazel's interpretive artistry, he is unquestionably one of the most formidable and accomplished musicians of our time. Yet his reputation is based almost entirely on his work as a conductor. Though he has said that he has composed music throughout his career, only in the last 15 years or so has he turned out large-scale, ambitious works. Mr. Maazel, 75, began composing "1984" some three years ago. It's a complex score, more than two and a half hours of music, demanding a large cast and a big chorus. Instead of picking a modest subject for his first opera, he chose a landmark novel. Today some readers find Orwell's themes overblown and dated. Yet at a time when the world is rife with ethnic and religious hatred, Orwell's vision of a fanatical government policing the thought of its people can seem dismayingly relevant" [Anthony Tommasini, The New York Times, 5/15/05].

May 6

Leos Janacek's *Pohadka* (Fairy Tale), for cello and piano, Matthias Ronnefeld's *Sextet* (1979), and Gyorgy Kurtag's *Hommage a R. Sch.* "[Sextet] is his longest surviving work. Its five movements show a brilliantly gifted young composer enthralled with Gyorgy Ligeti and Berg yet bursting with avant-garde originality. His rapturous sense of color, vivid ear for unearthly harmony and flair for drama captured the imaginations of the excellent players . . . Kurtag's . . . [work is a] modernistic meditation on Schumann in six aphoristic movements for piano, viola and clarinet" [Anthony Tommasini, 5/9/05].

May 7

Michigan Opera Theater's premiere performance of Richard Danielpour's *Margaret Garner*. Detroit, MI. "Garner was a runaway slave who in 1856 killed a daughter rather than return her to slavery. She became the high-profile defendant in a trial arguing the crime involved: murder or destruction of property? More recently, she is the source of the novel *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, who wrote the libretto for this opera. Detroit's inner city -- spiritually and physically devastated by racial division and now struggling to rebuild -- is an apt ground zero for this production, which is also being shared by the Cincinnati Opera and the Opera Company of Philadelphia. Elaborate efforts have been made: a strong cast of international quality and a simple but professional production. The Detroit Opera House, lavishly spruced up, was filled with elegant representatives of all parts of this city. Richard Danielpour has composed a melting pot in tones. Its sincere, sometimes touching, desire to accommodate everybody and everything, and its ability to do so with a little more character than most contemporary American opera, should do good things for his future. Mr. Danielpour's soothing eclecticism is like an

attentive host seeing to his guests' every need. There are lyrical ballads tinged with the sweet ardors of Broadway. The musical language hews to gracious harmonies. Mr. Danielpour offers few surprises, but who says he has to? The Afro-centric gestures arrive through the kinds of filters constructed by men like George Gershwin two generations ago. If Margaret Garner does not borrow from *Porgy and Bess*, it seems to have learned a lot from it. The cast is splendid. Denyce Graves takes the title role. . . . Margaret Garner begins briskly with a battery of high-energy choruses, but the opera ends up being too long for what it has to say. . . . One longs for a directness and velocity carrying Margaret from the auction block to family separation to flight and recapture. There are sags at the middle and the end. The opera, to be fair, is hostage to a story not of its own invention - operatic in spirit, not very operatic in structure. Some ruthless editing might create a more relentless arc of events for this opera and discourage its creators from lingering overly long over their lyrical ambitions and elegant texts. Verdi worshiped Shakespeare, but it did not stop him from performing drastic reductive surgery on his plays" [Bernard Holland, The New York Times, 5/9/05].

Brooklyn Philharmonic in George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, *An American in Paris*, and a deftly conceived arrangement of arias, songs, and choruses from *Porgy and Bess*, prepared by Lorin Maazel, with the Total Praise Choir of Emmanuel Baptist Church, conducted by Chelsea Tipton II. Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York, NY. "Tipton led sweeping and vibrant performances" [Anthony Tommasini, The New York Times, 5/10/05].

May 8

Tribeca New Music Festival: The Emerging Avant-Pop, with violinist Mary Rowell and pianist Geoffrey Burleson. Frank Zappa's *Bebop Tango*, Carol Alban's *Elegy* (2005), Randall Woolf's *Try to Believe* (from *Bodegas*), Michael Sahl's *Grand Sonata*, Preston Stahly's *Three Pieces for Violin and Piano*, Charles Ives's *Three-Page Sonata* (1905), Vincent Persichetti's *Sonata No. 12* (1982), Flea Theater, New York, NY. "Woolf's work . . . puts the violin against an electronic drumbeat and samples originally played, hip-hop style, on turntables and included in the computer track. There are few boundaries here: Minimalism morphs into a dense, electric blues solo and then into a single line that has the character of a Bach prelude. The works that Ms. Rowell and Mr. Burleson played together were [by] Michael Sahl . . . and Preston Stahly They have elements in common. Both allude to a competing pair of Romantic traditions: long-lined, lyrical melodies, particularly for the violin, and overt virtuosity for both instruments. Both also reach into pop music's rhythmic arsenal, with Mr. Sahl pulling out tight syncopations for his sonata's closing Rondo, and Mr. Stahly using pointed jazz rhythms in his opening movement, and something closer to the insistent energy of rock in the last two" [Allan Kozinn, The New York Times, 5/11/05].

May 10

Orpheus in Prokofiev's Symphony No. 1 ("Classical") and Sofia Gubaidulina's *Concordanza*. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. "[Prokofiev's work], a 20th-century remake of 18th-century style, belonged more to Sibelius's world than to Haydn's. . . . *Concordanza*, [is] a mostly quiet little melodrama that runs through a catalog of innovative effects: gentle buzzings and tremolos, human whispers, whiny glissandos, a chirping aviary of wind instruments, all punctuated by nervous outbursts" [Bernard Holland, *The New York Times*, 5/12/05].

Young Concert Artists, including Kevin Puts's Marimba Concerto. Rose Hall, New York, NY. "The evening opened with a flourish and a marimba player, Naoko Takada, in a work written for her by Kevin Puts that ran stoutly counter to most expectations of what a contemporary marimba concerto will sound like. Mr. Puts's piece is frankly Neo-Classical without actually sounding retro: conservative, that is, but not stale. The orchestra offered pretty light themes on which to bed the flurry of sound from Ms. Takada's mallets, and pulled back in the third movement to offer a more virtuosic and contemporary-sounding perpetuum-mobile-style showcase" [Anne Midgette, *The New York Times*, 5/12/05].

May 12

World premier of Tom Dean's *White Darkness* (with Lori Zook), after Sergei Prokofiev's *The Fiery Angel*. Oakland Opera Theater, Oakland, CA. "An intriguing opera 'mash-up' of Prokofiev and 1978 tragedies . . . a bewildering but fascinating melange of disparate parts. It combines figures from voodoo religion, Haitian rhythms and the horrific events of San Francisco in 1978 (Dan White, Jim Jones) into a strangely compelling amalgam. If the results don't ever quite make sense, you could say the same about most of the individual components. Madness reigns in *The Fiery Angel*, just as it did at Jonestown and in San Francisco's City Hall during White's murderous rampage, and *White Darkness* samples some of that hysteria to telling effect. Dean's hourlong score, conducted with serene aplomb by Music Director Deirdre McClure, is built around Prokofiev's melodies and harmonies, but with the rhythms and orchestration jettisoned. In their place is a bouncy, dancelike impulse that propels the action forward" [Joshua Kosman, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 5/14/05].

New York Philharmonic in Igor Stravinsky's *Histoire du Soldat* and J.S. Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 3* and *5*. Avery Fisher Hall, New York, NY. "*Histoire* . . . [is] one of the small, delicate joys of 20th-century music. . . . [For the concertos] period instruments and Baroque practices were more or less out the window. This was big, gleaming Bach on instruments built to fill spaces like Avery Fisher Hall with sound. Lionel Party and Robert Langevin played the elaborate harpsichord and flute solos, and Bach survived nicely, as he always seems to do regardless of how posterity plays with his originals. . . . Stravinsky conceived *L'Histoire* as a kind of traveling carnival show, though it never went on the road. . . . The music, in six scenes and two acts, can be said to have

been influenced by jazz, although in 1918 Stravinsky knew jazz only through sheet music. But with its wonderful off-kilter movement and washed-clean sonorities, *L'Histoire* does more than tell the Romantic movement to drop dead. Beyond the politics and polemics operates a light-filled, life-giving energy. This small masterpiece should never cease to open the eyes and warm the heart. The small but steady stream of prematurely exiting subscribers didn't seem to agree. F. Murray Abraham, Marian Seldes and Tim Blake Nelson were the actor-narrators. . . . *L'Histoire* is not easy music to organize" [Bernard Holland, *The New York Times*, 5/14/05].

May 13

North American premiere of Franco Alfano's *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1936). The Metropolitan Opera, New York, NY. "It is no unjustly neglected masterpiece. It is not even an especially good opera. But thanks to a vibrant production by the director Francesca Zambello, an admirable cast and, especially, the impassioned portrayal of the title role by Plácido Domingo, *Cyrano de Bergerac* does prove an engaging entertainment. The Met agreed to present this opera, a co-production with Covent Garden in London, at the behest of Mr. Domingo, who wanted to make *Cyrano* the 121st role of his career. At the Met Mr. Domingo gets what he wants. Why shouldn't he, having brought his vocal luster, great artistry and star power to nearly 600 performances there so far. The three-performance run of *Cyrano de Bergerac* is sold out. Alfano, who died in 1954, is best known for having composed the extended final scene of Puccini's unfinished opera *Turandot*, drawing on Puccini's very sketchy sketches. Alfano's music for *Turandot* has long been deemed adequate at best, clunky at worse. Though his 1904 opera *Risurrezione* enjoyed enormous popularity for a couple of decades, today it seems a shameless potboiler. *Cyrano* comes from the period when Alfano was cozy with the Fascist regime in Italy. To his credit, he did not sign the manifesto of 1932 that condemned modernism in Italian music. Still, he comes across in *Cyrano* as a composer determined to please, though here and there in the score are remnants of his musically adventurous youth, spent in Leipzig and Paris. . . . The richest moments of Alfano's score are the subdued scenes, especially the tender duet between *Cyrano* and *Roxane* in Act II. Here you admire Alfano's dusky orchestral colorings and ruminative vocal lines (though in general, his melodic gift is thin). The score is at its most awkward during the rowdy crowd scenes, when the music swells mindlessly and Alfano seems a Debussy wannabe with a passing knowledge of Strauss. There is a difference between boldly unmoored tonal language, like Strauss's, and Alfano's sometimes incoherent harmony. It must be hard for the singers to stay on pitch when the vocal lines take such random turns and the orchestral harmony keeps shifting underneath. Still, the opera certainly has a meaty leading tenor role. Though at 64, he looks a little paunchy and is not the most nimble-footed swordsman, Mr. Domingo projects *Cyrano*'s cockiness and gravitas through his fervent singing and charismatic presence. A savvy actor, he finds the tragic core of a character who fears that he looks not just foolish but ugly. The soprano Sondra Radvanovsky brings a rich, tremulous soprano voice and affecting intensity to the

role of Roxane. The tenor Raymond Very is a Christian of robust voice and youthful bearing. Anthony Michaels-Moore, a sturdy baritone, has fun as the inflated nobleman de Guiche, who also loves Roxanne. The conductor Marco Armiliato seizes on every moment of subtlety in Alfano's score and wisely underplays the pumped-up passages. . . . You have to admire the Met's willingness to add this curiosity to its repertory. Still, the company has yet to present any opera by Michael Tippett, Hans Werner Henze, Olivier Messiaen, or several other 20th-century giants. Lucky Alfano has Mr. Domingo pushing for him" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 5/16/05].

May 14

Chicago Symphony Orchestra in an All-Bartok Program: Four Pieces for Orchestra, Piano Concerto No. 1, and Concerto for Orchestra. Carnegie Hall, New York, NY. "When Pierre Boulez, a complexly modern composer, conducts older music, he approaches each score as if were the work of a fellow composer, a living colleague. Somehow he recaptures the cutting-edge qualities of older works, from Wagner operas to Ravel concertos. . . . Hard-core Bartok lovers who find . . . his popular [Concerto for Orchestra] too accessible should have heard Mr. Boulez's revelatory performance. Mr. Boulez let the big things -- the narrative arc of the music, the dramatic mood shifts -- take care of themselves. Instead he focused his acute ear on unorthodox and strange details moment to moment. In the second movement, a scherzando, while the winds played a deceptively rustic theme, the lower strings articulated a series of pizzicato notes. The way Mr. Boulez conducted those off-beat pizzicato accents, they sounded like nervy little jabs to the body of the piece. When the unexpected happens and a mellow brass chorale began, rather than smoothing out the phrases Mr. Boulez encouraged the players to emphasize the astringencies tucked into the chords. I've heard the episodic first movement performed with a greater sense of inexorability, but never with a more mysterious quality of volatility. Who knew what was coming next? The program opened with a mesmerizing account of Four Pieces for Orchestra (composed in 1912 but not orchestrated until 1921). This is music of a young man enthralled with, but not at all intimidated by, Debussy. As presented in this incisive and shimmering performance, you heard Bartok thinking not 'What can I learn?' from Debussy but 'What can I use?' Even 'How can I top him?' Daniel Barenboim, the Chicago Symphony's music director, was the piano soloist for a riveting account of the Piano Concerto No. 1, an intense and mercurial work. Mr. Barenboim was the master of the finger-twisting, arm-blurring piano part, which unabashedly treats the piano as a percussion instrument. He and Mr. Boulez seemed co-conspirators in an effort to make this 1926 concerto seem more dangerous than anything being written today" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 5/16/08].

May 16

Rome's Orchestra of the Santa Cecilia Conservatory, conducted by Lionello Cammarota, in

Franco Mannino's *Enigma*, Ada Gentile's *Improvviso*, Walter Piston's *Capriccio for Harp and Strings*, Ottorino Respighi's *Ancient Airs and Dances, Suite 3*, Giuseppe Mule's *Largo*, and Nino Rota's *Concerto Soiree*. Hunter College Assembly Hall, New York, NY. "Enigma was all clashing chords and dark drama, with a quotation from Beethoven's *Eroica* and a happy major-chord ending. *Improvviso*, by Ada Gentile, a teacher and administrator at the conservatory, was one of those quiet, near-motionless and, in this case, simplified reflections on the early orchestra experiments of Gyorgy Ligeti. Like his *Atmosphères* and *Lontano*, her *Improvviso* offers drifting, slowly changing harmonies punctuated by little stabs and shudders. In contrast, Walter Piston's *Capriccio for Harp and Strings* was brisk and businesslike. Cecilia Andreis played the solos. Ottorino Respighi's sweet, indulgent look at ancient music, his *Third Suite from Antiche Arie e Danze per Liuto*, offered the evening's best playing. . . . My own heart was lost to Giuseppe Mule's *Largo*, which sang Mascagni-like with heart-on-sleeve melodiousness. I also liked Nino Rota's *Concerto Soirée* for piano and orchestra, an inventive and good-humored quasi parody of concerto styles from Liszt to Chopin to Ravel, interspersed with Rota's own imaginative takes on popular culture. (What would the Godfather movies have been without his magical music?) Monaldo Braconi played the elaborate piano part with style and skill" [Bernard Holland, *The New York Times*, 5/18/05].

May 23

Works and Process, with Milton Babbitt and Charles Wuorinen, including Arnold Schoenberg's Op. 33a, Igor Stravinsky's *The Owl* and the *Pussycat*, and Babbitt's *Two Sonnets* and *Elizabethan Sextette*. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY. "Listening to Milton Babbitt's music . . . was like standing outside the window of a small, locked house and looking in. Inside was Mr. Babbitt talking with the composer Charles Wuorinen, listening to mostly his own music and basking in the admiration of his admirers. Music of such space-age syntax would not survive five minutes in the great outdoors of classical music, but these are works seemingly happy in their small and protected space. Heard in the four piano pieces played by Alan Feinberg was a whiff of waltztime or a tango beat, but nothing of traditional musical sentence structure survives their violent contrasts, leaps and flurries. Music is reinvented, but one wonders if Mr. Babbitt has anywhere to take it, or whether the question is important. . . . The Schoenberg is poignant for surging, sighing and accenting just as Brahms would have done, while at the same time removing the tonal underpinnings that made Brahms phrase the way he did. The past is both worshiped and abandoned. The fastidious cleanliness of the Stravinsky was as much about his earlier music as its 12-tone language. Mr. Babbitt's world demands esoteric performing skills. Conservatory solfège was, I suspect, of little use to the baritone Thomas Meglioni's stunning negotiation of *Two Sonnets*. One's jaw dropped as well at the six young women, conducted by Fred Sherry, singing the *Elizabethan Sextette*, requiring part-singing so distant in difficulty and manner that one had literally to learn music all over again" [Bernard Holland, *The New York Times*, 5/25/08].

New York New Music Ensemble in *Games People Play*. David Rakowski's *Two Can Play That Game* (1995) for bass clarinet and marimba, Wayne Peterson's *Rhapsody* (1976) for cello and piano, Hiroya Miura's *Open Passage* (in Memoriam Andrew Svoboda), John Anthony Lennon's *Red Scimitar* (2004), and Andrew Imbrie's *Pilgrimage* (1983). Merkin Concert Hall, New York, NY. "Rakowski's work is like a brisk tennis match: its lines are rhythmically interlocked, with melodic material moving between them. Jean Kopperud, the clarinetist, and Daniel Druckman, the percussionist, kept the work's energy level steady and made the most of the jazz-inflected rhythm that drives the piece. . . . Andrew Imbrie's *Pilgrimage* . . . demanded the same kind of rhythmic interplay as the Rakowski score and had much of the drive of the Lennon, although its three-movement structure allowed it to move farther afield" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 5/25/05].

May 29

Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* presented by Los Angeles Opera. Dorothy Chandler Pavillion, Los Angeles, CA. "Though [the opera] contains some of Strauss's most sublime music, the opera is padded with overly long and musically subpar comic bits. But it has seldom seemed as dramatically effective as it did under Mr. Nagano, and his fleet tempos were only part of the reason. He rid the score of the schmaltz that has accrued to it from wrongheaded notions of Straussian style. Not one milked phrase, not one slice of ham marred Mr. Nagano's interpretation. He was keenly attentive to the intricate rhetoric of the music, that is, to the layout of phrases. Clarity was more important than charm. His conducting embodied the life motto of the opera's most beloved character, the Marschallin, who tells her adolescent lover, Octavian, that he must hold things fast, then let them go. . . . Over all, Los Angeles has mounted a "*Rosenkavalier*" to ponder. Opera-lovers here had better prepare for Mr. Nagano's departure, though. In 2006 he becomes the music director of the Bavarian State Opera in Munich and the Montreal Symphony Orchestra" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 5/31/05].



Recording

John Williams. *Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith*. Sony Classical. "Though there are vocal dissenters, most film critics and *Star Wars* buffs seem pleased with the last installment of the epic. . . . Music plays almost throughout the entire movie, and much of the emotional resonance critics are finding is stoked by Mr. Williams's surprisingly subdued and murky score, especially during the scenes of intimate human drama, such as they are. . . . Although Mr. Williams became a household name for "*Star Wars*" in the late 1970's, many critics poked fun at him for the comic-book excess of his scores. True, he was no Bernard Herrmann or Elmer Bernstein. But even in Mr. Williams's pre-*Jaws* days, when he was churning out disaster-flick music (*The Towering Inferno*), his work was thoroughly professional. At a time when synthesized film music was ascendant, he re-embraced the symphonic film score. Still, with all their bombastic blather, the early *Star Wars* scores invited kidding. . . . Mr. Williams has grown since then. . . . [E]vocation is one way to practice the film music craft, and in "*Revenge of the Sith*" Mr. Williams demonstrates his acute evocative skills. The film begins, as it must, with his swashbuckling *Star Wars* theme playing as the credits roll by. But soon into the story (the second track on the Sony Classical recording of the score) you hear the haunting music for Anakin's Dream. Seized with nightmarish premonitions that his pregnant wife will die in childbirth, Anakin sleeps fitfully while the quietly ominous music stirs primordially in the background. There are hints of Ligeti-like atmospherics (surely Mr. Williams's homage to 2001) and echoes of Samuel Barber in the pungently chromatic harmony. A lacy theme is passed back and forth between solo string instruments. You may not remember this elusive melody when you leave the theater, but it conveys Anakin's inner doubts and longing for repose. In an episode called *Battle of the Heroes*, Mr. Williams has his *Carmina Burana* moment, complete with pummeling rhythms and a distant chorus intoning mournful ah's and ritualistic oh's - a hokey device. In *Palpatine's Teachings* he evokes, or so it seems, Tibetan Buddhist chanting, with sustained moans in low male voices, tinkling percussion (like finger cymbals) and ruminative string writing. The whole *Star Wars* epic has been likened to Wagner's *Ring* cycle. . . . In the new film, when Anakin is on the brink of becoming Darth Vader, you know what's coming, and it comes: the treading *Darth Vader* theme, as much a trademark of the *Star Wars* enterprise as Han Solo action figures. But in general, Mr. Williams uses the leitmotif technique with greater subtlety here. Hints of themes thread through the score - in inner voices, in wayward bass lines. There is even an episode called *The Immolation Scene*, an overt reference to Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*. Having lost the ultimate light saber duel to Obi-Wan, Anakin starts slipping into a molten pool of volcanic muck. The Jedi master watches in despair as he allows the student he once loved, the chosen one who has turned to the dark side, to meet his fate (or so he assumes). Mr. Williams sensitively underplays this scene, writing wistful, aching music, a sort of sci-fi Sibelius. . . . Some film composers command your attention - with sweeping grandeur (Maurice Jarre's score for *Lawrence of Arabia*), with wistful lyricism (Elmer Bernstein's melancholic

music for *To Kill a Mockingbird*). Mr. Williams is at his best when he thinks no one is paying much attention. His concert pieces, like *Soundings*, composed for the opening of the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, tend to be bustling, extroverted and eager to please. But film music can offer a composer an artful way to stay in the background. Mr. Williams practices that art admirably in *Revenge of the Sith*" [Anthony Tommasini, *The New York Times*, 5/23/05].

