

George Crumb the complete piano music

CD1 (total playing time 73.29)

Makrokosmos, volume 1

Part I		
1	1 "Primeval Sounds" (Genesis I) – Cancer	5.05
2	2 "Proteus" - Pisces	1.07
3	3 "Pastoral" (from the Kingdom of Atlantis, c.10,000 B.C.) - Taurus	2.03
4	4 :"Crucifixus" [SYMBOL] – Capricorn	3.24
Part II		
5	5 "The Phantom Gondolier" – Scorpio	3.55
6	6 "Night Spell 1" - Sagittarius	4.28
7	7 "Music of Shadows" (for Aeolian Harp) - Libra	3.09
8	8 "The Magic Circle of infinity" (Moto perpetuo) - Leo	2.14
Part III	g, (p-1/p-10-7)	
9	9 "The Abyss of Time" – Virgo	3.08
10	10 "Spring Fire" – Aries	1.49
11	11 "Dream Images" (Love-death Music) – Gemini	4.44
12	12 "Spiral Galaxy" [SYMBOL] – Aquarius	3.03
	-1 1	
Makrol	cosmos, volume 2	
Part I		
13	1 "Morning Music" (Genesis II) - Cancer	2.43
14	2 "The Mystic Chord" – Sagittarius	2.28
15	3 "Rain-Death Variations" – Pisces	1.31
16	4 "Twin Suns" (Doppelgänger aus der Ewigkeit) [SYMBOL] – Gemini	3.39
Part II		
17	5 "Ghost Nocturne: for the Druids of Stonehenge (Night Spell II) - Virgo	2.43
18	6 "Gargoyles" - Taurus	1.13
19	7 "Tora! Tora!" (Cadenza apocalittica) – Scorpio	1.51
20	8 "A Prophecy of Nostradamus" [SYMBOL] - Aries	3.30
Part III	, .,	
21	9 "Cosmic Wind" – Libra	2.20
22	10 "Voices from 'Corona Borealis" - Aquarius	4.42
23	11 "Litany of Galactic Bells" – Leo	2.41
24	12 "Agnus Dei [SYMBOL] – Capricorn	4.49

CD2 (total playing time 62.01)

Five Pieces for Piano 1 quasi improvvisando 2 34 2 2 ruvido, molto energico - Prestissimo 1.13 3 3 notturno – sempre pizzicato 2.50 4 ruvido, motlo energico - Prestissimo 1 14 5 5 senza misura, liberamente 3.58 **Gnomic Variations** 6 Tema - lentamente, deciso 1.11 Section I Variation 1 - energicamente, un poco più mosso 0.42 8 Variation 2 - molto ritmico, ancora un poco più mosso 0.53 9 0.37 Variation 3 - capriccioso, ancora più mosso 10 Variation 4 - un poco agitato, ma velato; lo tempo stresso 0.43 11 Variation 5 - più lento, molto espressivo 0.54 12 Variation 6 - largamente, retoricamente 2.07 Section II 13 Variation 7 - grave, ben sostenuto 2.15 14 Variation 8 - molto ritmico, allegro possible 0.57 1.51 15 Variation 9 - lentamente, elegiac 16 Variation 10 - molto moderato 1.13 17 0.38 Variation 11 - grazioso, un poco scherzando 18 Variation 12 - prestissimo 1.05 Section III 19 Variation 13 - misterioso 2.22 20 Variation 14 - quasi recitative, decisamente 1.08 21 0 44 Variation 15 - implacabilmente 22 Variation 16 - lo stesso tempo 0.37 23 Variation 17 - sonoro, maestoso 2 02 24 Variation 18 - (tema) - lentamente, deciso 1.30 Processional 25 11.27 sempre pulsando, estaticamente A Little Suite for Christmas After Giotto's Nativity frescoes in the Arena Chapel at Padua 2 42 26 1 "The Visitation" - poco lento: solenne 27 2 "Berceuse for the Infant Jesu" - andantino, guasi lontano 1.33 28 3 "The Shepherd's Noël" – quasi pastorale 1 18 29 4 "Adoration of the Magi" - semplice 1.21 30 5 "Nativity Dance" - vivace: gracioso, esuberante 1.08 31 6 "Canticle of the Holy Night" - lentamente; misterioso, quasi lontano; flessibile 4.07 32 7 "Carol of the Bells" – giocoso, giubilando; guasi meccanico 2 17

George Crumb the solo piano music

"Music might be defined as a system of proportions in the service of a divine impulse." (George Crumb)

Every period seems to throw up a composer whose music embodies the moment yet transcends it

I first heard the music of Crumb in a Purcell Room concert in 1968. It stood out from the rest of the *avant-garde* programme for its delicate and sensitive timbres that beguiled the ear. Ten years later I found myself in the same hall giving the London première of *Makrokosmos II*. Crumb's works in the intervening years had become more and more familiar in the concert hall. Moreover his corpus of piano music was growing. By the mid eighties the composer had a body of work to his name which, while paying homage to the radical experiments of the sixties and seventies, was remarkable for its instantly recognisable style, its integrity of purpose and its mysticism. Moreover it was a style that did not alienate audiences.

That Crumb's piano music emerges from the sixties avant-garde is evident in the Five Pieces for Piano of 1962. Palindromic in structure, this was his first exploration of extended techniques. His imagination was caught by the possibilities of new ways of creating sound. These pieces, using a variety of techniques inside the piano, show us a composer well able to hold his own in the prevailing modernist style.

Yet it is with the magnificent "Makrokosmos" series, the first two of which are for solo piano, that Crumb's piano style reaches maturity. This maturity, however, now embraces both experiment and tradition. The spirit of two great predecessors permeates the music. From Debussy we find harmonic planes, pentatonic scales, modes, and impressionistic haze. From Bartók we find sounds of nature, chord clusters, rhythmic grip and of course the title itself echoing that of the great cycle of didactic pieces (Mikrokosmos). But in his extraordinary ability to initiate strange and beautiful sounds Crumb is unique. The third (sostenuto) pedal may be used to create a halo of resonance, the piano may be turned into a harp with pizzicato on different parts of the string with different parts of the finger. Foreign objects may be used to activate sound; paper clip, tumbler, metal chain, thimble etc. Makrokosmos, Volume I (Twelve Fantasy-Pieces after the Zodiac for Amplified Piano) composed in 1972 has an introduction by the composer which gives us an insight into the thought behind these pieces:

While composing "Makrokosmos", I was aware of certain recurrent haunting images. At times quite vivid, at times vaque and almost subliminal, these images seemed to coalesce

around the following several ideas: the "magical" properties of music: the problem of the origin of evil: the "timelessness" of time: a sense of the profound ironies of life: the haunting words of Pascal: "Le silence eternal des espaces infinis m'effraie" ("The eternal silence of infinite space terrifies me"): and these few lines of Rilke:" Und in dem Nachten fallt die schwere Erde aus alien Sternen in die Einsamkeit. Wir alle fallen. Und doch ist Einer, welcher dieses Fallen unendlich sanft in seinen Handen halt" ("And in the nights the heavy earth is falling from all the stars down into loneliness. We are all falling. And yet there is One who holds this falling endlessly gently in his hands").

The twelve movements of Volume I, as in Volume II, are grouped in three sets of four, each set ending with a symbol - the look of the piano score imitating the content of the music. Thus we find crucifix, circle, spiral and 'ban-the-bomb' sign among others. There are half-remembered quotes from Beethoven, Chopin and Schumann together with the Dies Irae theme.

Makrokosmos Volume I shows us the composer as essentially a miniaturist aggregating movements to create a larger piece in Schumannesque fashion. If that work remains twelve loosely connected movements, Makrokosmos Volume II (1973) welds these movements into a powerfully extended thirty five minute shape, hinging on the memorable moment of transition between movements seven and eight, being left with the nihilism of movement nine - brief flutterings after the nuclear holocaust. Crumb's imagination is at white heat!

A Little Suite for Christmas, A.D. 1979 (1980) retains this feeling for overall structure but is more intimate in scale as befits its subject, a moving allusion to the "Coventry Carol". In Gnomic Variations (1981) the individual movements have now become short, pithy variations, each capturing a characteristic mood and moving forward by contrast or by intensification. The extended techniques are integral to the design since the theme itself alternates plucked and damped notes.

That Crumb does not necessarily need extended techniques to fire his imagination is shown by Processional (1983) which is almost all played conventionally. The haunting repetitions and large ten-minute movement make it unique among his piano works and an important contribution to twentieth-century piano literature.

Philip Mead studied piano at the Royal Academy of Music in London and became an international prize winner in contemporary music. He has since performed at many festivals in Britain and overseas and has recorded for many radio stations. He has been at the forefront of developing a repertoire for piano and electronics, working with such composers as Jonathan Harvey, Denis Smalley, Javier Alvarez and Stephen Montague and has performed this repertoire extensively throughout the world.

Since 1997 he has become very interested in the possibilities of expanding the repertoire for brass and piano. He has commissioned work from such composers as Nicholas Sackman, Diana Burrell and Geoffrey Poole, and has recorded for NMC as well as his acclaimed recordings for Metier.

The music of radical American composers has always had a central place in his repertoire. He has recorded all the major solo piano works of Ives for METIER and has performed it extensively in the UK and US. He made his Carnegie Hall debut performing the Henry Cowell Piano Concerto with the American Symphony Orchestra during the Bard Festival and repeated his performance with the BBC Symphony at the Barbican during the John Cage "Uncaged Festival" in January 2004 which was broadcast on BBC Radio Three and BBC Four television. In 1978 he began his exploration of extended piano techniques with a scholarship to prepare for the London premiere of George Crumb's *Makrokosmos* Volume II at the South Bank. Since then the music of Crumb has featured regularly in his programmes and in 1997 he directed a festival of the composer's works which included the European premiere of Quest.

Philip Mead is founder and artistic director of the British Contemporary Piano Competition, held every three years since 1988. This has become established as an important part of the new music calendar with many of today's younger pianists as past prize winners. Mead is also a Research Fellow at the University of Hertfordshire, and was a Director of the Society for the Promotion of New Music from 1994 to 1998.

Recorded at the old concert hall, Manchester University on 12 January 2002 (CD1 tracks 13-24), 27 August 2002 (CD1 tracks 1-12) and 17-18 June 2003 (CD2)
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Philip Mead also appears on these Metier recordings



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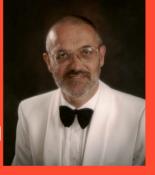
A rare recording of Ms Norman's challenging music for piano, tape and electronics, bringing the listener 'inside' the timbres of sounds and expressing the nuances of experience with unflinching intensity and intimacy

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George Crumb



Philip Mead

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