

Steven M. Bruns

George Crumb in Prague and Boulder 1992: A Tale of Two Festivals

In 1992, College of Music faculty and students from the University of Colorado participated in two international Festivals and Symposia featuring the music of George Crumb. The first part of this collaboration with musicians and scholars from the Czech Republic took place in Prague on March 17–20. The second Festival was held in Boulder from October 9–12. The Prague Crumb Festival, for economic and practical reasons, was somewhat smaller in scope, with two evening concerts and two days of lectures and panel discussions. In Boulder, the schedule was expanded to include four full evening concerts and three days of Symposium events.

Although Crumb's music is widely known in the United States, in western Europe, and other parts of the world, political and economic constraints greatly limited its dissemination in the Czech Republic (and Slovakia) until quite recently. Live performances were exceedingly rare, and scores and recordings were prohibitively expensive, when they were available at all. Professor Amy Lynn Barber has lived in Prague since 1989, when she arrived as a Fulbright Lecturer in American Music. Following her lecture on Crumb's music a few years ago in Prague, she was struck by the audience's strong and enthusiastic response, and she resolved to expose them to Crumb's music in concert. Soon thereafter, Barber communicated with her friend and former Texas Wesleyan colleague, C.U. faculty pianist Tanya Gille, and the idea for the Prague and Boulder Crumb Festivals was born. I agreed to plan the lectures, panels, and other Symposium events. Two other University of Colorado faculty members, mezzo-soprano Julie Simson and conductor Allan McMurray, were engaged as featured guest artists. Once George Crumb accepted our invitation to attend as distinguished Guest of Honor, there followed months of grant writing, negotiations with numerous Czech and U.S. government agencies, and, of course, hours of research and rehearsal.

These preparations culminated in the Prague Crumb Festival and Symposium in Prague, March 17–20, 1992, which brought an unprecedented amount of Crumb's music before Czech audiences and gave participants the rare opportunity to discuss the music directly with the composer. The elaborate rehearsal schedule in the days before the opening March 17 concert was necessitated by the different arrival dates of the four C.U. faculty. Tanya Gille arrived in Prague first, allowing for preliminary rehearsals with her three Prague collaborators on *Music for a Summer Evening*, the longest work on the program. Julie Simson and I arrived the afternoon of March 13. After an all-

but-sleepless flight, Simson stepped immediately into a two-hour rehearsal of the challenging *Madrigals, Book I*, for soprano, vibraphone (Amy Lynn Barber), and contrabass (David Fendrych), one of the works scheduled for the first concert. The remaining rehearsals for the March 17 were squeezed into any available time slot for the next several days. *Vox Balaenae (Voice of the Whale)* was played by members of Agon, a contemporary chamber ensemble led by composer and pianist, Miroslav Pudlák. Mr. Pudlák was joined by his flutist wife, Veronika, and cellist Jiří Bářta. *An Idyll for the Misbegotten* was performed by Martin Čech (flute) and percussionists Amy Barber, David Rehoř, and Vladimír Vlasák. Tanya Gille played the solo piano *A Little Suite for Christmas, A.D. 1979*. The final work on the opening concert, *Night of the Four Moons*, involved conductor Allan McMurray, who arrived the same afternoon as George Crumb (March 16). *Four Moons* involved five Czech performers: Tereza Roglová (mezzo-soprano), Martin Čech (alto flute and piccolo), Jiří Bářta (cello), Rudolf Dašek (banjo), and Amy Barber (percussion). The composer was present to coach the players for the final rehearsals, which continued almost up to the starting time for the concert. Despite the rather frantic circumstances, the opening concert was a great success, with a large and receptive audience. The concert took place in the concert hall of St. Agnes Monastery near the Moldau, and was taped for broadcast by Czech Radio. The setting could hardly have been better, both acoustically and visually. The blend of gothic and modern architecture seemed an apt visual counterpart to the mixture of ancient and modern elements in Crumb's music. After the concert, the composer remarked that the off-stage music at the end of *Four Moons* had never been more effectively realized than it was that evening at St. Agnes.

On March 18, in the recital hall of the Czech Music Fund, Barber opened the Symposium with a brief address, followed by my biographical sketch of the composer. Then, Barber and I conducted a public interview with Crumb, followed by questions from the audience. The afternoon session opened with a lecture-demonstration, "The Sound World of George Crumb," during which the performers demonstrated the extended playing techniques used in Crumb's music. The final event was my lecture, "Quotation in the Music of George Crumb," during which I had my first experience with live translation (by our expert assistant, Petr Dorůžka), not to mention the unnerving experience of discussing Crumb's music with him in the audience. (During one of my initial telephone conversations with Crumb, I confessed that I had never before discussed the music of a composer who was present at the time and that I was quite nervous at the prospect. In his inimitable way, Crumb replied, "Why, you must be studying too many dead composers!").

The second day of the Symposium, March 19, began with my lecture on the harmonic language of Crumb. Then Dr. Miloš Uličný, a faculty member at Charles University (University Karlovy), spoke on the poetry of Federico García Lorca. After lunch, Miroslav Pudlák discussed the *Makrokosmos* cycle. The final event, a panel discussion on learning to perform Crumb's music,

was moderated by Barber. She was joined by George Crumb, Professors Gille, McMurray, Simson, Pudlák, Maxián, and Dorůžka. This proved to be a particularly stimulating dialogue, with numerous questions from the audience. I was impressed by how well many of the audience members knew Crumb's music, despite their limited access to it. The audience was a broad mix of young students, performers, journalists (some from Bratislava), and professors from the Prague Conservatory and Charles University. We also met several young U.S. students living in Prague. Also attending was William Osborne, a composer living in Munich who had studied with Crumb at the University of Pennsylvania.

The final event was a concert on March 20, again held at St. Agnes Monastery. The first piece was *Music for a Summer Evening* (Gille, Maxián, Barber, Vlasák). The second half of the concert was Crumb's best-known Lorca setting, *Ancient Voices of Children*, a fitting conclusion. The ensemble, conducted by Allan McMurray, included Julie Simson (mezzo-soprano), Václav Barth (boy soprano), Jiří Vodnanský (oboe), Rudolf Dasek (mandolin), Karel Moudrý (musical saw), Dagmar Platilová (harp), Emil Viklický (piano), and percussionists Barber, Vlasák, and Řehoř. This heterogeneous collection of musicians seemed to embody the unexpected juxtapositions of musical styles in Crumb's piece. The harpist and oboist were experienced symphonic players with little background performing new music. The pianist and mandolinist were more at home playing jazz in night clubs. Our musical saw player had supplied eerie sound effects for many a film soundtrack. And the percussionists spanned two generations and two continents! It is evidence of the universality of Crumb's music that all of these people were able to produce compelling performances after only a few days together.

Boulder was a logical location for the second part of the project, because it was at the University of Colorado that George Crumb's distinguished international career began in the 1960s. From 1959 until 1964, he was on the faculty of the College of Music, where he taught piano and classes on contemporary music. In 1962, at the request of his faculty colleague, David Burge, Crumb composed *Five Pieces for Piano*, the first work in his mature style. Another landmark composition, *Night Music I* (1963), dates from the Boulder years. It was the first of Crumb's many settings of the poetry of Federico García Lorca. In 1965, after a year as Composer-in-Residence at the Buffalo Center for the Creative Arts, Crumb joined the composition faculty of the University of Pennsylvania where he has taught ever since. The Boulder festival was, thus, a "homecoming" of sorts. George and Elizabeth Crumb were joined in Boulder by guest artists from Prague, distinguished performing artists and scholars from throughout the U.S., and many former colleagues and old friends. The festival attracted people from throughout the Denver metropolitan area, as well as faculty and students from the University of Northern Colorado, Colorado State University, the University of Kansas, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, and elsewhere. In planning the events, we aimed to present a retrospective survey of Crumb's

music, performing as much of it as possible, and including a varied selection of lectures, panels, interviews, and exhibits.

The central focus of the festival was, of course, the four evening concerts. The opening Friday concert repeated the program of the second Prague concert, though with different personnel. *Music for a Summer Evening, Makrokosmos III* (1974) featured C.U. pianist Tanya Gille and the three Czech guest artists, pianist František Maxián and percussionists, Amy Lynn Barber and David Rehoř. The program concluded with *Ancient Voices of Children* (1970), and those who had performed the work in Prague (Simson, Rehoř, Barber, McMurray) were joined by new colleagues: Joel Johnson (boy soprano), James Brody (oboe and harmonica), Steve Mullins (mandolin), Laura Okuniewski (harp), Tanya Gille (piano), Dan Hanna (percussion), and David Claman (bowed musical saw). Mr. Claman, an M.M. composition student, mastered the saw specifically for the occasion! The wide appeal of Crumb's music was evident in the enthusiastic response of the overflow audience.

Each subsequent evening included another portion of Crumb's *Makrokosmos* cycle and one of the Lorca settings. Saturday's concert included the darkly dramatic Lorca setting, *Songs, Drones and Refrains of Death* (1968), for baritone voice (Robert Best), electric piano and harpsichord (Robert Spillman), electric guitar (Charles Wolzien), electric contrabass (Paul Erhard), and percussion (David Merrill and Mark Foster), with Thomas E. Morgan conducting. Pianist Paul Floyd (now of Pasadena, California) played the twelve pieces of *Makrokosmos I*, the 1972 tour-de-force for solo amplified piano. Crumb's interest in extended techniques may be traced back to his 1962 *Five Pieces for Piano*, the work which opened the concert, played by the composer's long-time friend, Paul Parmelee.* The Saturday concert closed with Robert Spillman's premiere performance of *Five New Pieces for Piano (Hommage à George Crumb, 1992)*, a "suite" of five pieces composed for the occasion by C.U. faculty Greg Dyes, Charles Eakin, Luis Jorge González, Joseph Lukasik, and Richard Toensing. Each piece uses compositional techniques associated with Crumb, including quotation, *soggetto cavato* (pitch motives derived, or "carved," from the composers' names), and characteristic Crumbian harmonic structures.

On Sunday, guest pianist Eleanor Elkins (on the faculty of Northern State University, South Dakota), opened the concert with *Makrokosmos II* (1973). For Crumb's 1985 piece, *An Idyll for the Misbegotten*, flutist Martha Fabrique was joined by percussionists David Rehoř, Amy Lynn Barber, and Doug Walter. The second half of the concert began with Tanya Gille's performance of *A Little Suite for Christmas, A.D. 1979*. The evening closed with *Night of the Four Moons* (1969), featuring Julie Simson (mezzo-soprano), Karen Yonovitz (alto flute and piccolo), Dennis Loranger (banjo), Judith Glyde (cello), Dan Hanna (percussion), and Allan McMurray (conductor).

*Sadly, the Boulder Crumb Festival was to be the last time Paul Parmelee and the Crumbs were together. Professor Parmelee succumbed to cancer on 7 January 1993 at his home in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

The final concert on Monday evening began with the fourth and final portion of the *Makrokosmos* cycle, *Celestial Mechanics (Cosmic Dances for Amplified Piano, Four Hands)*, performed by C.U. faculty pianists Alvin Chow and Tanya Gille. The second half of the concert opened with the witty Lorca miniatures, *Federico's Little Songs for Children* (1986), for soprano (Patti Peterson), flute (Karen Yonovitz, doubling on piccolo, alto flute, and bass flute), and harp (Laura Okuniewski). The closing work, one of Crumb's most popular pieces, *Vox Balaenae (Voice of the Whale)*, was played by Karen Yonovitz (flute), Alvin Chow (piano), and Judith Glyde (cello).

During the mornings and afternoons of concert days, George Crumb attended open rehearsals for many of the works on the program, allowing a rare glimpse of the composer advising the players on aspects of performance. As had been the case in Prague, we were impressed by Crumb's acute sensitivity to the smallest details of each score and his encouraging attitude toward the players.

The opening event of the Symposium on Saturday morning was a public interview with Crumb conducted by Thomas Riis, Director of the American Music Research Center. A transcript of this interview appears in this issue. Three public lectures were aimed both to average concert goers and more specialized students of Crumb's music. Professor Ester Gimernat González, a Professor of Hispanic Studies and Women's Studies at the University of Northern Colorado, surveyed the life and art of Federico García Lorca, whose poetry has inspired so much of Crumb's music. My lecture, "In stilo Mahleriano: Crumb's *Night of the Four Moons*," analyzed the composer's sophisticated "parody" of Haydn's "Farewell" Symphony and Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* in his 1969 chamber piece, a topic related to my article appearing elsewhere in this journal. Professor Richard Bass (University of Connecticut at Storrs) spoke on "George Crumb and the Tradition of Musical Enigmas," a lecture exploring the composer's use of quotation, parody, isorhythm, and other time-honored techniques. At the Composers' Analysis Seminar on Monday, Dr. Bass led a discussion of the fourth movement ("Approach, Strong Deliveress!") from *Apparition*, Crumb's 1979 Whitman songs for mezzo-soprano and piano.

The other Symposium events comprised three panel discussions. The first of these, "The Boulder Years," brought together George Crumb with six individuals who had known him well during the early 1960s. Wayne Scott, who moderated the panel, was a faculty colleague, as were Emeritus Professors of piano, Paul Parmelee, Howard Waltz, and Storm Bull. The latter three were dedicatees of pieces in Crumb's *Makrokosmos II*: "Gargoyles" (P.P.), "A Prophecy of Nostradamus" (H.W.), and "Cosmic Wind" (S.B.). Other panelists were Patricia Burge, a pianist and composer now teaching at Colorado State University; Anne M. Culver, Chair of the Department of Music History at the Lamont School of Music, University of Denver; and Thomas MacCluskey, who manages Soundstream Digital Editing Studio, BMG/RCA Records, New York. Parmelee and MacCluskey, a percussionist, were in-

volved in early performances of Crumb's music, including the first recording of *Night Music I*, with the composer conducting. The recollections and anecdotes related by these individuals will be remembered by many as one of the highlights of the weekend.

The second panel, "George Crumb in Prague," summarized the events of the Prague festival, beginning with a videotape of excerpts from rehearsals, panels, and concerts. The panelists included the three guests from Prague (Barber, Rehoř, and Maxián) and the C.U. faculty who had collaborated with them (Bruns, Gille, Simson, and McMurray). Audience members were interested to learn of the changing political and economic conditions in Czechoslovakia, and they heard the viewpoints of two native Czechs as well as Professor Barber, who had been in Prague during and after the so-called "Velvet Revolution." On the final afternoon, six Colorado composers joined Crumb for a Composers' Roundtable: Karl Kroeger (moderator), Greg Dyes, Charles Eakin, Joseph Lukasik, Brenda Romero, and Richard Toensing. The discussion explored Crumb's wide-ranging impact on the contemporary musical scene.

One of the most celebrated aspects of Crumb's music is the beautiful calligraphy of his scores; they often include symbolic shapes, such as notation in the shape of circles, spirals, crosses, as well as evocative titles and performance markings. Audience members were able to peruse numerous Crumb scores, recordings, and photographs (many from the Prague festival) in a comprehensive exhibit expertly prepared by Joanne Swenson Eldridge of the AMRC.

As four busy days neared an end, Dr. and Mrs. Storm Bull hosted a closing reception at their home before the final Monday evening concert. The animated conversation and memories shared by the Crumbs and their Colorado friends brought events to a happy conclusion. The candid photographs taken on that occasion supplement the recordings that document the Boulder Crumb Festival. On deposit in the AMRC are tape recordings of the four concerts, and videotapes of the three panel discussions and Riis's public interview with the composer. Videotapes from the Prague Festival include the two concerts, the closing panel discussion, and portions of Crumb's rehearsals with the players.

The Prague and Boulder Crumb Festivals are only two of the outcomes of the AMRC's ongoing efforts to promote the study and performance of American music. Plans are underway for five College of Music faculty (Steven Bruns, Alvin Chow, Kathleen Cook, Tanya Gille, and Julie Simson) to return to Prague in late May, 1994. They will join Amy Lynn Barber and George Crumb in leading a week-long intensive workshop on the analysis and performance of Crumb's chamber music.