

1 **GEORGE CRUMB** (b. 1929)  
*A Little Suite for Christmas, A.D. 1979* (15:16)

1. The Visitation
2. Berceuse for the Infant Jesu
3. The Shepherd's Noël
4. Adoration of the Magi
5. Nativity Dance
6. Canticle of the Holy Night
7. Carol of the Bells

2 **RICHARD WERNICK** (b. 1934)  
*Sonata for Piano (Reflections of a Dark Light)* (41:11)

1. Reflections of a Dark Light
2. Fragments of Things Remembered
3. "...in the forehead of the morning sky"

**LAMBERT ORKIS**  
**PIANO**



Total time: 56:17

Notes by William K. Bland

**George Crumb (b. 1929)**  
*A Little Suite for Christmas, A.D. 1979*

Written for Lambert Orkis, *A Little Suite for Christmas, A.D. 1979* is, in Crumb's characterization, an "aural tableau" of seven pieces conceptually related to the Nativity frescoes of the Arena Chapel in Padua, Italy. The private chapel, painted by Giotto di Bondone (1267?-1337) and finished in 1305, traces, through a series of separate panels, the lineage and conception of Jesus, incidents in his life, and his crucifixion and resurrection. These frescoes, instrumental in initiating the transition from a Medieval to Renaissance 'style' of expression, were revolutionary not only for their bold use of colors and formal balance, but also, for their humanistic portraiture.

Only two of the pieces from the Suite are actually based on panels from the Chapel—1) *The Visitation* and 4) *Adoration of the Magi*. The remaining five pieces are related instead to a seasonal observance of the Nativity.

1. *The Visitation* encapsulates the dramatic range of the entire Suite—from the solemn opening chords through its clangorously celebratory chiming figure.

2. *Berceuse for the Infant Jesu* is a traditional cradle song—a gently rocking rhythm accompanying a lullaby-like melody.

3. *The Shepherd's Noël* makes reference to the French song-form, Noël, which specifically celebrates the birth of Jesus.

4. *Adoration of the Magi* is a blend of ritualistic

repetition and extreme dynamic contrast.

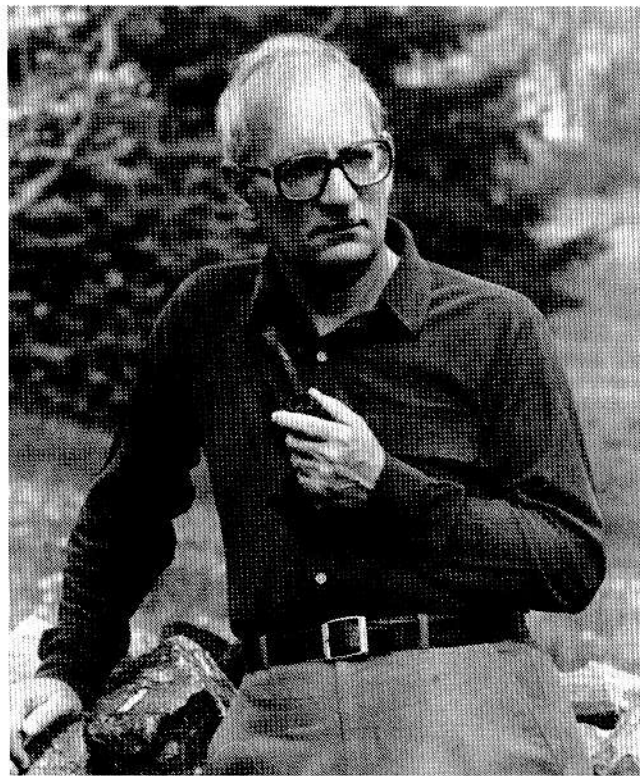
5. *Nativity Dance* is the dynamic peak of the Suite's arch. This piece mirrors the dancing and pageantry of a Medieval "mystery play."

6. *Canticle of the Holy Night*, (from the Italian hymn-form, canticle) includes a setting of the English *Coventry Carol* (1591), performed with the direction, "like a minstrel's harp."

7. *Carol of the Bells* concludes the Suite, and includes a cyclic return to the chiming figure heard in *The Visitation*.

As with all of Crumb's writing for the piano, an extensive use of the piano's interior aural possibilities is utilized, including string harmonics, pizzicati, et al. But especially in this Suite, the use of very long, pedal-sustained sonorities, both tintinnabular and intimate, creates a background canvas from which voices appear and submerge.

Considered together like the panels of a fresco, these seven pieces convey both an extroverted sense of wonderment and joy, and an inward contemplation of the religious intertwining of the human and metaphysical. The mystery of God becoming man, is to Christians, the beginning of the fulfillment of God's promise to redeem humankind. Giotto, a fervent Christian, represented this in scenes both joyous and quietly personal. *A Little Suite for Christmas, A.D. 1979* portrays a similar balance.



George Crumb

## Richard Wernick (b. 1934)

### *Sonata for Piano (Reflections of a Dark Light)*

Richard Wernick's *Sonata for Piano*, commissioned by and dedicated to Lambert Orkis, was completed in 1982, and is the composer's first work for solo piano. Wernick's *Sonata* is an extended, massive composition—structurally, pianistically, and above all, emotionally. The composer has characterized the intense first movement as containing "anger and despair," the second movement by "reminiscence" (a partial reflected memory), and the final movement, with spiritual "hope," especially suggested in a final chorale. The subtitles to the *Sonata* and each of the movements are a non-programmatic guide to this flow.

The first movement opens with dramatically powerful chords, presenting material to be developed throughout the *Sonata*. A single declamatory line follows, providing an immediate example of the extremes of balance and contrast which reoccur during this movement. Three large-scale tempo structures—Tempo 1 *Maestoso*, Tempo 2 *dreamlike*, *misterioso*, and a faster Tempo 3, are frequently interposed in abrupt, even jarring contrast. This sense of urgent agitation and disorientation culminates in a climactic restatement and expansion of the opening material.

The second movement, *Adagio*, is as the subtitle suggests, a series of musical fragments. The first three are based on material from the first movement, while a fourth fragment is a transformed quote from *Apparition*<sup>1</sup>, by close personal friend George Crumb. The quotation comes from the movement "Come, Lovely and Soothing Death," and leads to a climax based on material related to

the first movement. Further juxtaposition of the fragmentary motives continues until a third climactic statement has been reached, after which a quiet resolution leads to the third movement.

The final movement is a theme with eight variations. Three brief variations precede the statement of the theme, which is Baroque in character. The three variations which follow the theme build in intensity until the seventh variation, which combines material from the preceding variations, including a recall of the opening of the second movement. The final variation, *Epilogue*, contains two levels of musical structure. An inner level, played "as from a great distance," is chorale-like, and is a natural conclusion to the Baroque character of the theme. Surrounding this serene chorale are harshly intrusive chords, based on elements of both the opening of the *Sonata* and the first variation.

After the dark introspection of the first movement, and the static, immobile inarticulation of the second movement, the Baroque melody and chorale are like a return, a reaffirmation of a spiritual faith...the "light" as yet incompletely seen and comprehended, emerging and separating from the "dark."

In this regard, the works by Crumb and Wernick, widely divergent in musical language, are similar in philosophy. Both express the transforming and purposeful emergence of a spiritual hope.

<sup>1</sup>*Apparition* (1979) on a text by Walt Whitman, for soprano and amplified piano. Recorded on Bridge BDG 2002.



Richard Wernick

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A A D

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# LAMBERT ORKIS

## Pianist



LAMBERT ORKIS, noted twentieth-century music interpreter and chamber music artist, has toured five continents, appeared on nationwide radio and television broadcasts, and recorded for Nonesuch, CRI, Orion, Aubergine, Opus One, Bridge, and the Smithsonian Collection labels. He currently holds the position of Principal Keyboard of the National Symphony Orchestra of Washington, D.C., and is a member of the Twentieth Century Consort, Millennium Ensemble, the Smithsonian Chamber Players, and the American Chamber Players.

Recent performances have included an appearance on Public Broadcasting System's *GREAT PERFORMANCES* as piano soloist with the National Symphony, Mstislav Rostropovich conducting; and as soloist in Beethoven's *Choral Fantasy* and Strauss' *Burleske*, under the direction of Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos. Mr. Orkis has accompanied cellist Mstislav Rostropovich throughout the United States, Canada, Australia, and the Far East.

Mr. Orkis is currently Professor of Piano at Temple University. He received the Diploma and Bachelor of Music degree from The Curtis Institute of Music having studied with Eleanor Sokoloff, and the Master of Music degree from Temple University where his teacher was Maryan Filar.