

GEORGE CRUMB

(b. 1929)

Songs, Drones and Refrains of Death (25:10)

[for Baritone, Electric Guitar, Electric Contrabass, Electric Piano (Electric Harpsichord), Percussion (2 players)]

1 Part One (9:26)

Refrain One

I. La Guitarra (The Guitar)

Refrain Two

II. Casida de las Palomas Oscuras (Casida of the Dark Doves)

2 Part Two (15:45)

Refrain Three

III. Canción de Jinete, 1860 (Song of the Rider, 1860)

Refrain Four

IV. Casida del Herido por el Agua (Casida of the Boy Wounded by Water)

• Speculum Musicae •

Sanford Sylvan, baritone; David Starobin, electric guitar;

Donald Palma, electric contrabass;

Aleck Karis, electric piano and electric harpsichord;

Daniel Druckman and Eric Charlston, percussion

A Little Suite For Christmas, A.D. 1979 (14:58)

- 3 1. The Visitation (3:09)
- 4 2. Berceuse for the Infant Jesu (1:43)
- 5 3. The Shepherd's Noël (1:09)
- 6 4. Adoration of the Magi (3:00)
- 7 5. Nativity Dance (0:58)
- 8 6. Canticle of the Holy Night (3:03)
- 9 7. Carol of the Bells (3:31)

Lambert Orkis, piano

Apparition (22:44)

Elegiac Songs and Vocalises for Soprano and Amplified Piano

- 10 I. The Night in Silence Under Many a Star (3:10)
- 11 Vocalise 1: Summer Sounds (0:59)
- 12 II. When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd (1:36)
- 13 III. Dark Mother Always Gliding with Soft Feet (2:58)
- 14 Vocalise 2: Invocation to the Dark Angel (0:59)
- 15 IV. Approach Strong Deliveress! (2:07)
- 16 Vocalise 3: Death Carol ("Song of the Nightbird") (0:40)
- 17 V. Come Lovely and Soothing Death (6:18)
- 18 VI. The Night in Silence Under Many a Star (3:49)

Jan DeGaetani, mezzo-soprano

Gilbert Kalish, amplified piano

Songs, Drones and Refrains of Death

In 1962, George Crumb (b. 1929, Charleston, West Virginia) began a cycle of chamber music settings of the poetry of Federico García Lorca (b. 1892, near Granada, Spain; died (by firing squad) 1936, Granada). The first completed composition of the series was the *Night Music I* (1963). Then followed, (in order of completion): *Madrigals, Book I* (1965); *Madrigals, Book II* (1965); *Songs, Drones and Refrains of Death* (1968); *Madrigals, Book III* (1969); *Madrigals, Book IV* (1969); *Night of the Four Moons* (1969); and *Ancient Voices of Children for Children* (1970). A postscript to this cycle was added in 1986 with *Federico's Little Songs for Children*. Additionally two other compositions from the time period of the cycle utilize fragments of Lorca's poetry spoken or incanted by the instrumentalists; *Eleven Echoes of Autumn* (1965); and *Echoes of Time and the River* (1967).

Rarely has a composer's evolution of musical expression been so inextricably formulated and intertwined with his exploration of a single poet's work. Lorca's poetry assimilated a multitude of artistic styles, but was particularly influenced by the Futurist energy and surrealist symbolism of such artists as Marinetti, Dali, Arp, Picasso and Stravinsky among others. This fusion of influences molded a poetic style which contained fantastic counterbalances of extremes; realist and surrealist juxtapositions within a perspective that is observant rather than experiential. And always contained in the poetry is the symbol and presence of Death, and the influence of the "dark sounds" and emotion of "duende"—the evil side of nature. As Crumb has written: "Lorca's haunting, even mystical vision of death. . . is the seminal force of his dark genius."

The sharp-edged precision of Crumb's musical language developed in descriptive relation to this quality of Lorca's poetry. His initial acquaintance with Lorca occurred during his student years at Ann Arbor, Michigan, well before his first mature composition, the *5 Pieces* of 1962. That year Crumb began work on *Songs, Drones and Refrains of Death*, whose completion would require

some six years. As in other pieces of Crumb's Lorca cycle, an extremely broad array of coloristic resources is employed, including: amplified instruments; players and soloist shouting, whispering, humming, and singing; a very personal use of "fringe" instrumental techniques, and some 50 percussion instruments, played by all of the performers.

The eight compositions of the Lorca cycle reflect an ongoing maturation, not so much in musical language, but rather in an increasingly complex and richly textured transformation of the poetic implications and images of the text into musical expression. *Songs, Drones and Refrains of Death* is the largest composition of the Lorca cycle, both in musical forces used, and in the length and complexity of the form. The title, which is a conscious variation of Musorgsky's *Songs and Dances of Death*, reflects the three types of formal structure used. In *Songs, Drones and Refrains of Death*, the periodic arrangement of these forms is dramatically positioned to achieve a cohesive macro-structure. The following chart presents an outline of the two part structure:

Part 1				
Refrain I	Song I Death-Drone I	Refrain II	Song II	Pause
Part 2				
Refrain III	Song III Death Drone II	Refrain IV	Song IV Death Drone III	

Death-Drone III begins accompanying Song IV at the text, "levantaban al aire sus espadas" ("raised their swords to the air") and continues becoming louder and more intrusive, until an explosive ritornello of Refrain and Song fragments signals the ending and transfiguration of the Death-Drone, disintegrating to increasingly soft and distant echoes, leading finally to silence.

While the large structure of the piece contains discernible elements of both cyclic and rondo forms, a predominant structural unity is achieved by the use of a standard verse form, with the refrain material serving as an introduction to each separate poem (stanza). This balance is further emphasized by the placement of the "Casidas" as Songs II and IV. (The "casida" or "quasida" was an Arabic narrative-poetic form begun in 5th century Persia noted for its richly vivid use of imagery and language).

Throughout the entire range of Crumb's compositions, symbology has been a central aspect of his communicative language. In *Songs, Drones and Refrains of Death* several musical and philosophical symbologies are prominent. These range from overt musical "illustrations" of the text—such as piercing xylophone quintuplet figures before the text "heart grievously wounded by fine swords", or the Jew's harps imitating the sound of drops of water falling into the surface of a deep well—to the cycle-spanning metaphysical implications of the Death-Drone—always an emptily-dissonant Perfect 4th interval. Crumb's entire cycle of Lorca settings seems to move from the descriptive brilliance of the early works to the increasingly complex, dense sonorities of *Ancient Voices of Children*. In the setting of the last song of *Songs, Drones and Refrains of Death* Crumb consciously evokes the musical language of Mahler. Like many of Mahler's works, *Songs, Drones and Refrains of Death* has its beginning in the contemplation of Death, and its ending in an affirmation of the promise of a peacefilled transfiguration. *Songs, Drones and Refrains of Death*, like Lorca's poetry, is the product of a direct continuation of Classical and Romantic traditions, yet it empowers the creative imagination of the listener through its mastery of unique sonic and musical inspirations, placed in the service of an essentially spiritual Art.

La Guitarra

Empieza el llanto
de la guitarra.
Se rompen las copas
de la madrugada.
Empieza el llanto
de la guitarra.
Es inútil callarla.
Es imposible
callarla.
Llora monótona
como llora el agua,
como llora el viento
sobre la nevada.
Es imposible
callarla.
Llora por cosas
lejanas.
Arena del Sur caliente
que pide camelias blancas.
Llora flecha sin blanco,
la tarde sin mañana,
y el primer pájaro muerto
sobre la rama.
¡Oh, guitarra!
Corazón malherido
por cinco espadas.

The Guitar

*The lament of the guitar
begins.
The wine cups of daybreak
are broken.
The lament of the guitar
begins.
It is useless to hush it.
It is impossible to hush it.
It weeps monotonous
as the water weeps,
as the wind weeps
over the snowfall.
It is impossible to hush it.
It weeps for things far away.
Sand of the warm South,
asking for white camellias.
It weeps arrow without target,
evening without morning,
and the first dead bird
upon the branch.
Oh, guitar!
Heart grievously wounded
by five swords.*

English translation: J.L. Gili

Casida de las Palomas Oscuras

Por las ramas del laurel
vi dos palomas oscuras.
La una era el sol,
la otra la luna.
Vecinitas, les dije:
¿Dónde está mi sepultura?
En mi cola, dijo el sol.
En mi garganta, dijo la luna.
Y yo que estaba caminando
con la tierra a la cintura
vi dos águilas de mármol
y una muchacha desnuda.
La una era la otra
y la muchacha era ninguna.
Aguilitas, les dije:
¿Dónde está mi sepultura?
En mi cola, dijo el sol,
en mi garganta, dijo la luna.
Por las ramas del laurel
vi dos palomas desnudas.
La luna era la otra
y las dos eran ninguna.

Casida of the Dark Doves

*Through the branches
of the laurel
I saw two dark doves.
The one was the sun,
the other the moon.
Little neighbors,
I said to them,
where is my tomb?
In my tail, said the sun.
In my throat, said the moon.
And I who was walking
with the earth at my belt
saw two eagles of marble
and a naked girl.
The one was the other
and the girl was no one.
Little eagles,
I said to them,
where is my tomb?
In my tail, said the sun,
in my throat, said the moon.
Through the branches
of the laurel
I saw two naked doves.
The one was the other
and both were no one.*

English translation: W.S. Merwin

Canción de Jinete, 1860

En la luna negra
de los bandoleros,
cantan las espuelas.
Caballito negro.
¿Dónde llevas tu jinete muerto?
. . . Las duras espuelas
del bandido inmóvil
que perdió las riendas.
Caballito frío.
¡Qué perfume de flor de cuchillo!
En la luna negra,
sangraba el costado
de Sierra Morena.
Caballito negro.
¿Dónde llevas tu jinete muerto?
La noche espolea
sus negros ijares
clavándose estrellas.
Caballito frío.
¡Qué perfume de flor de cuchillo!
En la luna negra,
¡un grito! y el cuerno
largo de la hoguera.
Caballito negro.
¿Dónde llevas tu jinete muerto?

English translation: Stephen Spender and J.L. Gili

Song of the Rider, 1860

*In the black moon
of the highwaymen,
the spurs sing.
Little black horse.
Whither with your dead rider?
. . . The hard spurs
of the motionless bandit
who lost his reins.
Little cold horse.
What a scent of the flower
of a knife!
In the black moon
bled the mountainside
of Sierra Morena.
Little black horse.
Whither with your dead rider?
The night spurs
its black flanks
piercing with stars.
Little cold horse.
What a scent of the flower
of a knife!
In the black moon,
a shriek! and the long
horn of the bonfire.
Little black horse.
Whither with your dead rider?*

Casida del Herido por el Agua

Quiero bajar al pozo,
quiero subir los muros de Granada,
para mirar el corazón pasado
por el punzón oscuro de las aguas.
El niño herido gemía
con una corona de escarcha.
Estanques, aljibes y fuentes
levantaban al aire sus espadas.
¡Ay, qué furia de amor, qué hiriente filo,
qué nocturno rumor, qué muerte blanca!
¡Qué desiertos de luz iban hundiendo
los arenales de la madrugada!
El niño estaba solo
con la ciudad dormida en la garganta.
Un surtidor que viene de los sueños
lo defiende del hambre de las algas.
El niño y su agonía, frente a frente,
eran dos verdes lluvias enlazadas.
El niño de tendía por la tierra
y su agonía se curvaba.
Quiero bajar al pozo.
quiero morir mi muerte a bocanadas,
quiero llenar mi corazón de musgo,
para ver al herido por el agua.

Casida of the Boy Wounded by the Water

*I want to go down to the well,
I want to go up the walls of Granada,
to watch the heart pierced through
by the dark thrust of water.
The wounded boy was moaning
under his crown of rime.
Pools, cisterns, fountains
raised their swords to the wind.
What a fury of love, what a wounding edge,
such nocturnal murmurs,
such a white death!
Such deserts of light were crumbling
the sands of dawn!
The boy was alone,
the city asleep in his throat.
A water spout out of his dreams
wards off the hungry algae.
The boy and his agony, face to face,
were two green rains enlaced.
The boy stretched out on the ground,
And his agony bent over.
I want to go down to the well,
I want to die my own death, by mouthfulls,
I want to stuff my heart with moss,
to watch the boy wounded by the water.*

English translation: Edwin Honig

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 de 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 the metaphysical. The mystery of God becoming man is, to Christians, the beginning of the fulfillment of God's promise to redeem mankind. 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.

Apparition

Elegiac Songs and Vocalises for Soprano and Amplified Piano

Written in 1979 for Jan DeGaetani and Gilbert Kalish, *Apparition* is George Crumb's first work for solo voice and piano, and his first setting in English. The text of *Apparition* is extracted from Walt Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd", part of a set of poems grouped under the title *Memories of President Lincoln*. Whitman wrote "When Lilacs..." during the weeks following the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, April 14, 1865. Although Whitman's poem is specifically an elegy to Lincoln, Crumb has chosen most of his text from a section subtitled "Death Carol". This is a pause in the direct reference to Lincoln, and contains some of Whitman's most imaginative writing on the experience of death.

In *Apparition*, each song and vocalise form a piece of the larger vision, eventually coalescing as a tableau. The literary and musical materials focus on concise, highly contrasting metaphors for existence and death. Yet Crumb's cycle offers the listener reassurance, for just as in Whitman's verse, death is never depicted as an ending of life. Instead, it is circular, always a beginning or an enriched return to a universal life-force.

I. The Night in Silence Under Many a Star

The piano opens the cycle with a pulsating evocation of Nature, accompanying the soprano who sings of symbols of eternity: "the night", symbolic of the physical universe; "the ocean shore", symbolic of motion and time; "the soul", representative of consciousness; and "the body turning to thee", illustrative of the cycle of life and death. With the presentation of this symbology a stage is set, upon which more personal visions of death will appear.

Vocalise 1: Summer Sounds

Vocalise 1 sharpens the focus from the vastness of the first song to a more specific time and location—further preparation for the more personal elegies which follow.

II. When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd

This brief, delicate song contains the only text not from the "Death Carol". Whitman's memory of the fragrance of blooming lilacs became his symbol for the time-period following Lincoln's assassination. Crumb's setting conjures an elusive scent—gently drifting, intermixing, and separating. . . an expression of an ineffably sad memory.

III. Dark Mother Always Gliding Near with Soft Feet

This reverential elegy combines an intense personal plea with an instinctively religious hope for death as a release. Crumb's religiously allusive use of chant and imitative counterpoint further define this song as a prayer.

Vocalise 2: Invocation to the Dark Angel

Crumb has often balanced his quiet and ecstatic visions with representations of the evil aspects of nature. This vocalise is a harsh, primal invocation. It leads without pause into the fourth song.

IV. Approach Strong Deliveress

Death as emancipation is one of the most ancient human desires. In Whitman's metaphor of death as feminine and life-resurrecting, the concept of a deliveress is forceful and redemptive. Crumb reflects this in a relentlessly driving march. Propelled by implacable energy, this song is joyous in its hope for and embracement of death.

Vocalise 3: Death Carol ("Song of the Nightbird")

The singer of Whitman's "Death Carol" was a solitary hermit thrush:

'the grey-brown bird I know receiv'd us
And he sang the carol of death. . .

From deep secluded recesses,
Came the carol of the bird'.

V. Come Lovely and Soothing Death

Constructed as the culminant song of the cycle, this intensely personal summoning and welcoming of death transforms and extends the musical imagery of the preceding songs and vocalises into a final transcendent statement of the inevitability of death's arrival, "to all, to each".

VI. The Night in Silence Under Many a Star

After death, the forces of Nature remain; physicality, motion, consciousness, and life. Recapitulating the opening of the cycle, with no textual changes and only minor musical adjustments, Crumb re-affirms Whitman's view of the circularity of life and death.

Apparition

(Texts from Walt Whitman's *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*)

- I. The night in silence under many a star,
The ocean shore and the husky whispering
wave whose voice I know,
And the soul turning to thee O vast and
well-veil'd death,
And the body gratefully nestling close to thee.
- II. When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,
I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with
ever-returning spring.
- III. Dark mother always gliding near with soft feet,
Have none chanted for thee a chant
of fullest welcome?
Then I chant it for thee, I glorify thee above all,
I bring thee a song that when thou must
indeed come, come unfalteringly.

- IV. Approach strong deliveress,
When it is so, when thou hast taken them
 I joyously sing the dead,
Lost in the loving floating ocean of thee,
Laved in the flood of thy bliss O death.
- V. Come lovely and soothing death,
Undulate round the world, serenely
 arriving, arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,
Sooner or later delicate death.
- VI. The night in silence under many a star,
The ocean shore and the husky whispering
 wave whose voice I know,
And the soul turning to thee O vast and
 well-veil'd death,
And the body gratefully nestling close to thee.

SANFORD SYLVAN, *baritone*

A graduate of the Manhattan School of Music, Sanford Sylvan has become well-known for his operatic performances in the productions of Peter Sellars, including his portrayal of Figaro in *Le Nozze di Figaro* and Alphonso in *Così fan Tutte*. His association with John Adams began with his portrayal of Chou En-lai in *Nixon in China*; it continued with *The Wound Dresser*, which Mr. Adams wrote for Mr. Sylvan in 1989 and has since been performed across the country with St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and The Cleveland Orchestra. Earlier this year, Mr. Sylvan's debut recital recording *Beloved that Pilgrimage* with pianist David Breitman, was released on the Nonesuch/Electra label; future releases include Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin* and John Harbison's *Words from Paterson* with the Boston Symphony Orchestra Chamber Players. Most recently, Mr. Sylvan created the title role in John Adams's opera *The Death of Klinghoffer*.



JOHN CHOMITZ

SPECULUM MUSICAE ("A Mirror of Music") is an ensemble of extraordinarily gifted musicians dedicated to the pursuit of excellence in the performance of 20th century music. The ensemble has been a pacesetter in the commissioning of new works from both established and emerging composers. Since its debut performance at the Public Theater in New York on March 8, 1971, the ensemble has received consistent critical acclaim for performances which combine insightful analysis with brilliant execution. Speculum Musicae has presented concerts throughout the United States, and has toured in Switzerland, Poland, Great Britain and Germany. In addition to the members' excellence as performers, they are skilled as teachers and regularly conduct workshops, coaching sessions and seminars. Since 1982 the ensemble has been in residence at Columbia University, School of the Arts.



HOWARD WECHSLER

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.



JAN DeGAETANI

The distinguished American mezzo-soprano Jan DeGaetani in her 30-year career performed a broad range of repertoire and was recognized internationally for her dedication to the expansion of the vocal literature. Perhaps best known as a pre-eminent interpreter of 20th-century music (important works were written for here by such leading composers as Elliott Carter, George Crumb, Peter Maxwell Davies, and Richard Wernick, to name a few), she was also renowned for her performance of German lieder and French chansons, and sang with ease in many languages. In addition to her extensive performing and recording activities, Ms. DeGaetani exerted a profound influence on a new generation of singers and instrumentalists, teaching for many years at the Eastman School of Music and the Aspen Music Festival. Her long association with the Aspen Music Festival is being documented in Bridge's series of Jan DeGaetani concert recordings.



Gilbert Kalish, pianist

Gilbert Kalish has been acclaimed internationally for his presentation of piano literature spanning from the 18th century to the present. An eloquent spokesman for the music of his countrymen, Kalish's concert appearances throughout Europe, Asia, New Zealand and Australia and the United States, have established him as a major voice in American music making. Pianist for the Boston Symphony Chamber Players since 1969 and a founding member of the pioneering Contemporary Chamber Ensemble, his 30-year partnership with mezzo Jan DeGaetani was recognized as one of the finest artistic collaborations in the contemporary music world. Gilbert Kalish is head of Chamber Music and Keyboard Activities at the Tanglewood Music Center, and is Chairman of the Faculty and Professor of Piano at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. Mr. Kalish's discography of some 80 recordings can be heard on Arabesque, Bridge, Columbia, CRI, DG, Desto, Folkways, New World and Nonesuch Records.

Songs, Drones and Refrains of Death [D][D][D]

Producer: Michael Calvert

Engineer: Paul Zinman

Recorded at the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters June 17, 1990

The recording of *Songs, Drones and Refrains of Death* was supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency, and by a grant from the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust.

Bridge Records also gratefully acknowledges assisting grants from C. F. Peters Corp. and from the University of Pennsylvania.

A Little Suite for Christmas, A.D. 1979 [A][D][D]

Producer: Bill Bennett

Engineer: Curt Wittig

Digital Remastering: Toby Mountain (New England Digital)

Recorded at Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church, Bethesda, MD, in August, 1982

Apparition [A][D][D]

Producer: David Starobin

Engineer: David Hancock

Associate Engineer: Paul D. Lehrman

CD Transfer: Paul Zinman

Recorded at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, New York City, in October, 1982

Bridge Records: Becky Starobin and Carolyn Finger

Design: Brighton Typography, Ltd.

Cover Art: P. Craig Russell

Liner Notes: William Bland

Mastered by: Paul Zinman, David Starobin, and Michael Calvert

All music published by C.F. Peters Corp. (BMI)

Bridge Records, Inc.

GPO Box 1864

New York, NY 10116



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