



A performer's approach to East Asian musical elements in George Crumb's *Mundus Canis* (1998), for guitar and percussion

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(1) Explain how a performer can open new avenues of Interpretation by reaching into unfamiliar musical territory

(2) Establish a solid link between George Crumb and his use of East Asian musical materials

(3) Demonstrate how GC uses Asian elements in his music, specifically *Mundus Canis*

George Crumb:

“I sense that so far in the twentieth century, synthesis seems to be the big thing. Composers like Mahler, Debussy and Ives were all involved with combining things. They were anti-purists, in a sense. They were combining all the music they ever knew, or music that meant something to them, and they would put it in the same piece. And that process is still going on. Of course, we still have the purist approach, too, that exists or co-exists. But I rather believe that the world is, in a way, coming together, in the sense that all the musics might influence a composer, even if he lives in Media, Pennsylvania. It’s possible that music all the way around the world can influence his own music.”

Telephone interview with Bruce Duffie, 1988
(<http://www.bruceduffie.com/crumb2.html>)

George Crumb:

“Now we’re submerged... the whole world...is kind of one world musically. Movies or traveling groups of performers from Bali, we hear these sounds or we travel ourselves and hear this music other places.... The sounds are in our ear. There are wonderful collections of recordings. Even as a college student I heard in the Folkways Series music from Africa, the Orient, or South America and I never forgot these sounds. These are things so beautiful in their own right. I thought maybe they can be used in Western music and in fact many of these things have been introduced by composers over these last several decades.... When Debussy uses the crotales (antique cymbals) in his [Prelude to the] Afternoon of a Faun, it’s a beautiful sound and it seems to fit just that moment. Its not a gratuitous effect its organically related to his conception, it’s just the right sound.... The whole world is getting condensed and all these possibilities are there.”

-Conversation with David Starobin, Library of Congress, April 28, 2011.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVWfa0P9CXU>

George Crumb:

“I’ve also heard a lot of Eastern Music. I visited China some years ago and they wanted to make me an honorary Chinese composer because they heard something in my music that sounded Chinese, something I’d unconsciously incorporated, I guess. That’s what we are today; we’re composites. Our ears are open geographically.

I think of music as being so intimately connected with nature to start with. Composers who influenced my music wrote nature music. Debussy was a composer who was refracting through his aural prism the sounds of nature, replicating the rhythm of nature.”

-Interview with Thomas Riis at the George Crumb Festival in Boulder, Colorado, October 10, 1992. (<http://www.colorado.edu/amrc/sites/default/files/attached-files/0506-1993-003-00-000004.pdf>)

From Yanoi Uno Everett, Locating East Asia in Western Art Music (2004)

Compositional Strategies (post 1945)

- Transference
 - (1) Quoting culture through extra-musical means
 - (2) Borrowing aesthetic approaches without sounding “Asian”
 - (3) Evoking Asian sensibilities without explicit borrowing
 - (4) Quoting melodies by way of collage

- Syncretism
 - (1) Transplant East Asian musical attributes such as timbre, articulation, and scale systems into their western counterparts
 - (2) Juxtaposition of western/eastern instruments or ensembles into the same composition

- Synthesis
 - (1) Process of transforming Western and Eastern musical systems into a hybrid musical idiom

Identifying “the Eastern” in composition:

- accompanying material, i.e., title, accompanying poetry, introductory statement, etc.
- intervallic relationships: pentatonic, microtonal...
- melodic contour
- overall structure
- rhythmic or tonal repetition
- tempo and spacing of notes
- timbral differentiation of individual notes
- articulation and embellishment
- Notation
- improvisatory aspects
- pitch definition
- non-traditional use of dynamics

- **Jo-ha-kyu**

- (1) Important concept in Japanese aesthetics – music, cinema, martial arts, but especially the *Noh Theatre*
- (2) Introduction – scattering – rushing
- (3) Jo: expectation, exploration of the performing space
- (4) Ha: unfolding of a musical gestural idea
- (5) Kyu: culmination of the accelerando
- (6) Affects the tempo with which the piece is played

From Akira Tamba, *Aesthetics in the Traditional Music of Japan* (1976):

“... controlling the speed of the development, the intensity and the linking of Successive phrases which, in the *Noh Theatre* for example, move imperceptably from inertia to a quick movement with dynamism becoming apparent.”

Example of "Jo-ha-kyu" from the opening of Crumb's Mundus Canis:

for David Starobin

Mundus Canis

Five Humoresques for Guitar and Percussion (1 Player)

George Crumb

I. "Tammy"

Elegantly, somewhat freely
[♩ = 70]

The score is written for Guitar and Percussion. The guitar part is in treble clef, and the percussion part is in bass clef. The piece is marked 'Elegantly, somewhat freely' with a tempo of [♩ = 70]. The score is divided into three systems. The first system includes dynamics such as *p*, *pp*, and *ppp*, and performance instructions like *pressando* and *ritard.*. The second system includes *pp*, *ppp*, *mf*, and *f*, with *pressando* and *a tempo* markings. The third system includes *f*, *ffz*, and *mp/mb*, with *pressando il tempo* and *a tempo* markings. The percussion part features various rhythmic patterns and dynamics, including *p*, *pp*, *ppp*, *mf*, and *f*.