Dick Wernick, *George Rochberg, and George Crumb (left to right) get together near their home turfs in Delaware County just to oblige photographer Bruce Stromberg, who was obliging our readers.*

Three Penn composers

By Patricia McLaughlin

THEY laughed when I sat down to write about contemporary music. To write, specifically, about George Crumb, George Rochberg, and Richard Wernick, three composers who teach in Penn's music department. I'd known they were there all along. I'd heard of them. Once I even heard one of Crumb's works—I'm not sure anymore which one—in concert at the University Museum and liked it. I'd heard—vaguely—about their Pulitzers, their Naumburgs, their Ford and Rockefeller and Fromm and Guggenheim and N.E.A. fellowships and commissions. Beyond that, I knew just about nothing about them. I didn't know anything about their music. And I had, really, no idea how "important" they were on the contemporary music scene until I talked to Donal Henahan, the music critic of *The New York Times*, about them.

My friend Warren lent me some Bartók, some Honegger, some Cage, some Stockhausen, some Ives, some Hindemith, to listen to for background. He was going to lend me some Varèse, but he couldn't find any.

"Don't stack my records," he said. "Play them one at a time. Handle them only by the edges. Put them back in their jackets when you're through. Promise?" I promised.

Then he said, kindly, "Pats, don't try to be a music critic. Don't try to sound as if you know what you're talking about. You'll make a fool of yourself. You don't know anything about music. Don't pretend."

Somewhat tactlessly put, you may think, but nonetheless the advice of a true friend. I *don't* know anything about music.

I can usually tell the difference between, say, Handel and Wagner. There are a few things I recognize: the *Brandenburg*, Beethoven's Third, Fifth, Seventh, and Ninth Symphonies. But sometimes I get them mixed up.

Professors Crumb, Rochberg, and Wernick are all major figures in contemporary music

I have been to four operas in my life, and slept through major portions of three of them. (More to do with exhaustion than with boredom—I always seem to go to operas the day after a sleepless night. Fate, maybe.) The one I stayed awake for I sat through the first act of in a state of buzzing, blooming confusion: I'd been prepped on the drive into New York with a lengthy description of the plot of *L'Italiana en Algeri*. I didn't learn until intermission that what was actually going on on the stage of the Met was *Traviata*.

I have known for some time that serial music has nothing to do with Cheerios, but I'd never figured out what it did have to do with.

My musical sophistication is such that, when I interviewed George Crumb, what impressed me most was how well he played the piano. He was just fiddling around while I took pictures. But it sounded so infinitely much better than anything that had resulted from my high school piano lessons. The same with Rochberg. He played about 12 notes during the interview—just enough to give me an idea of what "imagist" music sounds like. But you could tell he knew what he was doing.

Still. The other night, after dinner with some friends, one of them put on a recording of what was—obviously—contemporary music. I wasn't paying attention. We were talking. After a while, he asked, "Does anybody know what this is?"

I listened for a minute. "Sounds like Jan de Gaetani," I said. "Is it?"

"I don't know," he said. He went to look at the record jacket. It was Jan de Gaetani, singing Crumb's *Ancient Voices of Children*.

So, there.

That's not really the point, though. As Rochberg said, "Is it important that when you hear a Beethoven symphony that you *know* that it's Beethoven? Suppose that you've never heard Beethoven before, and you're somewhere where there's a radio, and you hear this glorious thing—and you never find out that it's Beethoven. Does it *change* the fact that this is a glorious expression in music? Doesn't change it one iota. We make too much of this business of name."

No, the point is that, over the past couple of months of researching this piece, I, who had never listened to any music much past Beethoven, I, who had taken it for granted that contemporary music was something accessible only to contemporary musicians, have found several pieces of music written in the last decade that I actually like listening to.

Most of my *ad hoc* record collection of contemporary music has to go back to the library—or to Warren—next week. But there are a couple of records that I bought—paid my own money for—and that I expect to keep listening to. There are a couple more that I plan to buy as soon as I get paid for writing this article. And I mean to hold off on returning Wernick's tape of the single performance to date of *Visions of Terror and Wonder* until I can find someone with a reel-to-reel tape recorder who will let me play it one more time.

On the basis of this experience, I feel qualified to give you some advice. If you're at all interested in expanding your musical

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horizons past the 19th century, if you're interested in knowing what the music of Crumb, Rochberg, and Wernick is like, you shouldn't read this article, you should write it. Or, at least, you should research it.

Spend a Sunday at the Free Library listening to Rochberg's early work and being perplexed. (It helps if the person at the turntable across from yours keeps tapping his foot to the apparently foot-tapping rhythm that is coming, unheard by you, out of his earphones.)

Spend a couple of days at the University's Music Library, reading the highly technical works on contemporary music the music librarian will helpfully recommend as suitable for the general reader and becoming more perplexed. Read everything in every clipping file you can lay your hands on pertaining to Crumb, Rochberg, and Wernick—personality profiles, reviews, long critical articles—and run a lot of it through a Xerox copier. (The Xeroxing is largely occupational therapy; you may not understand most of this stuff, but at least you have physical possession of it, it's all right there in your briefcase.) Check the *Music Index*, the *Dictionary of Contemporary Music*, and so forth. Read Rochberg's "Reflections on Schoenberg," his "The Avant-Garde and the Aesthetics of Survival," and his "The Renewal of Music." Then re-read them. Read the liner notes on all of Crumb's, Rochberg's, and Wernick's recordings. You will have to buy a copy of *The Harvard Brief Dictionary of Music* to look up all the words you've come across that mean nothing to you: *retrograde, chromaticism, tone row, 12-tone method, tonality*, etc.

By now you should be solidly confused, impressed with (or depressed by) your quixoticism in having undertaken this project, and ready for the next step.

Stop by Rochberg's office in the Music Annex—it is so bare, furnished with a piano, a desk, two chairs, and an ashtray, that it looks unoccupied—and talk to him for a couple of hours about his music and that of his colleagues.

You will already know that Rochberg was born in Paterson, N.J., graduated from Montclair State Teachers College, and studied composition at the Mannes School of Music in New York with Hans Weisse, George Szell, and Leopold Mannes, before serving overseas during World War II. After the army, he studied at Curtis Institute and earned a master's degree at Penn. Rochberg is widely credited with rebuilding the music department in the 1960s. It was he who, as chairman of the department, invited George Crumb to join the faculty in 1965 and, in 1968, brought Richard Wernick to Penn. His most recent work, a violin concerto commissioned by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra during the Bicentennial, for Isaac Stern, has been performed by Stern with the Pittsburgh, the Chicago Symphony, and the San Francisco Symphony.

Crumb says that talking about music is like trying to say something that's already been said

You will find that he discusses contemporary music and its place in Western musical tradition elegantly, articulately, passionately. (He also has a nice smile, the kind that comes on suddenly and illuminates a face.) Get him to talk about the similarities between modern music and modern art and architecture. Get him to talk about tradition and the Japanese theater. Get him to play the piano. Ask him to explain all the things that have been confusing you for the past few weeks.

Take the Media Local to Moylan and spend a couple of hours with Wernick, talking about contemporary music and the way he writes his.

Wernick grew up in Dorchester, Mass., and still retains his Boston accent. He studied at Brandeis University and, after finishing his M.A., embarked on a varied composing career. He was musical director and composer-in-residence for the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and wrote a series of short ballets for the Canadian Broadcasting Company, spent seven years in New York doing free-lance composing for theater, TV, and film, and was, for two years, resident composer for the Bay Shore Public Schools in Bay Shore, Long Island. Wernick has taught composition at the State University of New York at Buffalo and at the University of Chicago. He has been musical director of the Penn Contemporary Players since he came to the University. He won his Pulitzer last year, for *Visions of Terror and Wonder*, but the accompanying fame has not yet quite caught up with him: a second performance of *Visions* has been scheduled for next season at Carnegie Hall, but so far it has been heard only once, at its premiere. "The strange thing about the timing of the Pulitzer Prize," Wernick points out, "is that it's announced about one month after all the major orchestras have made up their schedules."

Wernick will give you a brisk, no-nonsense explanation of what was going on in academic music in the Fifties and Sixties—i.e., serialism and aleatory music—and why he was never much interested in either. (He isn't alone. Crumb has never used what is known as the serial technique. Rochberg, a card-carrying serialist for a while, apparently—this is the impression I got from Henahan—assured his place in 20th-century musical history when he repudiated serialism in the early Sixties and began exploring the possibilities of traditional tonality.) Wernick also speaks both passionately and humorously about the general music public's avoidance of new music. Borrow his tape of *Visions of Terror and Wonder*. (He describes the composition as "a great, big orchestra piece, with voice—a *big* orchestra. It's not an anti-intellectual piece, but it's not meant to be studied in a classroom and then taken apart. It's very hard to characterize your own work—it's a big, Romantic work.")

Take the same train to Media and spend an afternoon with Crumb in his cluttered study. ("My wife says it's the messiest room in the house.")

Crumb has been a musician since he was six or seven, when his father, a clarinetist with the Charleston Symphony, started teaching him to play a small E-flat clarinet. (His hands were still too small to reach the fingering on a regular clarinet.) He started composing when he was 10—"little Mozart pieces, later on Romantic pieces, all imitative of earlier styles." He studied music at Mason College of Music and Fine Arts, at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, at the University of Illinois, at the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood, at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin, and at the University of Michigan, and he has taught at Illinois, Michigan, Hollins College, the University of Colorado, and at Buffalo. Crumb's Pulitzer was awarded in 1968 for *Echoes of Time and the River*.

People who write articles about Crumb are always describing him as "painfully shy." If you talk to him about anything but music—e.g., old photographs, which fascinate him—you will see immediately that this is a lot of baloney. Talking to him about music is another story. "You spend a couple of hours with him and go away thinking you've got some marvelous things, and then you look at your notes later, and you've got nothing," Henahan says. Talking about music, Crumb hesitates a lot, and frequently lapses into silence. I think partly he just doesn't *like* talking about music—especially his own—and partly he doesn't see the point in it, anymore than he sees the point of writing liner notes for his recordings. "It's like, you know, trying to say something that's been said," he says. "As far as you're concerned, it's been said definitively in the music itself.

"People want explanations, sometimes," he says. "But there's so much that's intuitive in composing that can't be accounted for. There's no way of proving much of anything. There's no way of really saying in words why

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Listening in: three discographies

George Crumb

Ancient Voices of Children............Nonesuch 71255

Black Angels............CRI 283, Vox/Turnabout 34610

Dream Sequence..........................Columbia*

Echoes of Time and the River.............Louisville 711

Eleven Echoes of Autumn, 1965...............CRI 233

Five Pieces for Piano..................Advance FGR-3

Four Nocturnes: Night Music II.........Desto 7157/59
Mainstream 5016

Lux Aeterna for Five Masked Musicians......Columbia*

Madrigals, Books I-IV.......................Vox 34523

Makrokosmos, Volume I................Nonesuch 71293

Makrokosmos, Volume II..............Columbia 34135

Music for a Summer Evening
(Makrokosmos, Volume III)..........Nonesuch 71311

Night of the Four Moons...............Columbia 32739

Night Music I...............................CRI 218

Sonata for Violincello.......................Desto 7169

Songs, Drones, and Refrains of Death.......Desto 7155

Vox Balaenae for
Three Masked Players ....Columbia 32739

George Rochberg

Bagatelles ....Advance

Black Sounds.......................Grenadilla Records

Blake Songs..........................Nonesuch 71302

Caprice Variations....................Musical Heritage

Carnival Music *(Alan Mandel, pianist)*..Grenadilla Records

Chamber Symphony for 9 Instruments.......Desto 6444

Contra Mortem et Tempus...................CRI 231

Dialogues for Clarinet and Piano...............Capra

Duo Concertante for Violin and Piano.......Advance 6

Duo Concertante for Violin and Piano.........CRI 337

La Bocca Della Verita...........Ars Nova/Ars Antigua

Music for the Magic Theater...............Desto 6444

Nach Bach *(harpsichord or piano)*......Grenadilla Records

Psalm 23.....................Trinity Church, New York

Ricordanza for Piano and Cello...............CRI 337

Serenate d'estate.....................Nonesuch 71220

Songs in Praise of Krishna........................CRI

String Quartet No. 1, 1952...................CRI 337

String Quartet No. 2, 1959-61 *(with voice)*.........CRI,
Vox/Turnabout 34524

String Quartet No. 3, 1971............Nonesuch 71283

Symphony No. 1, 1949-55.................Louisville 634

Night Music...............................Louisville

Symphony No. 2, 1958......................CSP 6379

Tableaux for Soprano and 11 Players...Turnabout 34492

Three Psalms..........................Oberlin College

Trio for Violin, Cello, and Piano......Turnabout 34520

Violin Concerto............................Columbia

Richard Wernick

Haiku of Basho.................................CRI*

Kaddish-Requiem......................Nonesuch 71303

Moonsongs from the Japanese.................CRI*

A Prayer for Jerusalem.....................CRI 344

Songs of Remembrance................Nonesuch 71342

**To be released.*

Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony is a great piece of music. Everybody knows it *is*—everybody with ears. It's just there, there's no question. But *why*—that's in the category of impossible questions."

Still, you can learn something from experiencing Crumb's visible unease when you ask him to talk about his music. You can learn something about the essential untranslatability of musical ideas into language, and you can learn something about what he means when he says, "I've been a purely intuitive composer."

You should also look at his scores—partly because they are, some of them, beautiful and amazing graphically, the staves spiraling or circling or forming crosses, and partly because, if you can read them well enough to grasp their technical sophistication—which I can't, I'm going on faith here—you will learn something about what Crumb *doesn't* mean when he says he's always been "a purely intuitive composer." ("Crumb is after simplicity," Henahan says, "but you look at the score and it's terrifically complex.")

And, if you're invited, you should certainly stay for dinner. You see a different side of Crumb when he starts pulling out his books of old photographs, and Liz Crumb's spaghetti, for all her apologies, is delicious.

All this will help. A few things will begin to fall into place. But, mostly, you should listen to the music. "Hearing the actual music is the best way to get into music," Crumb says. Listen to it, and listen to it again.

You will need to listen to it again because most contemporary music (Rochberg's recent work is an exception, sort of) doesn't sound like "regular" music, like the music most people are used to listening to. (Even Crumb admits that when he first heard Bartók, when he was a senior in high school in Charleston, W. Va., he was "perplexed. I didn't understand the style, it took some listening.")

I think it's because so much new music sounds "different" and perplexing that most people—even people who like other kinds of music—are not so much just *not interested* in contemporary music as they are actively prejudiced against it.

One night my friend Michael stopped by for a drink. "Michael," I said, "want to hear some contemporary music?"

"Not particularly," he said.

"You'll like it," I said, sounding like an Alka-Seltzer commercial. I played Rochberg's Ricordanza for Cello, composed in 1972, which Rochberg calls "an obvious regression to an earlier kind of musical thinking—it's a, for me, very beautiful, simple, direct piece of music, it just sings."

After the first few measures, Michael said, "That's not contemporary music. *I* know what contemporary music sounds like." He did admit he liked it.

Wernick says that most people haven't even discovered that music has been written in this century

Then I played Rochberg's Third String Quartet, which begins with what are, to a 19th-century ear, dissonant violins. "Ah," Michael said with some satisfaction. "Now *that's* contemporary music."

"What do you mean, Michael?" I asked.

"Screechy," he said.

Why does contemporary music sound so different from the music most people are used to listening to, I asked Wernick.

"Because they haven't listened to much new music, that's all," he said.

But even if they had, wouldn't it still sound different?

"Well," Wernick said, "every composer sounds different. Mozart sounds different from Beethoven—but people can identify with them. I'd hope my music would sound different from everybody else's, because I'd want it to be *mine*—but somehow your use of the word *different* is that it's *very* different from the music that most people are used to. But that's because most people are used to listening to music that was composed up until about 1880, and that's it. But this is 1977! The 20th century is almost over, and most people haven't even discovered that music has been written in this century.

"It's usually not their fault," he added quickly, forgiving. "It's the fault of the big orchestras and the mass media. It's much easier to promote something that people are already comfortable with. It's one of the great tragedies of our culture—77 years into the 20th century and my kids still come home from school and are told things about 20th-century music that are absolute *poppycock* because the teachers that are teaching music in the public schools don't know anything about it. They get told that there are no melodies! So my kid walks out of class whistling Aaron Copland's *Billy the Kid* for the teacher—nearly got slugged for doing it. They get told it's discordant, it's unpleasant. My kids and the Crumb kids—they listen to plenty of contemporary music, they just hear it, it's just natural for them, they don't mind it."

But do they actually *like* it? Do they have preferences?

"One of my kids, for example, likes Stravinsky very much—he loves to play Stravinsky, or listen to Stravinsky, so that's a preference. But he accepts Stravinsky like anybody else would accept Haydn. Absolutely nothing strange in that music to him. There was a performance on TV—he was playing in a youth orchestra at the time—of Schoenberg's Five Pieces for Orchestra, and he got very excited: he said, 'Why don't *we* play that?' He didn't realize it was a little too hard for a youth orchestra—but he wanted to play it, it was an exciting piece. So I think it's a matter of conditioning, I really do. If people will listen—and it's not even a matter of listening 'intelligently'—I think it's a matter of just *listening*."

To support his argument that most people have trouble listening to contemporary music only because they're not used to it, Wernick cites the example of a friend of his who came to this country from India—"He's Ali Akbar Khan's drummer, he's a wonderful musician, one of the leading people in India, and he could not understand Western music *at all*. And that included all of it—*all of it*—whether it was contemporary, Classical, or Romantic. He would just sit there bewildered—to him it was just one big cacophony, just like many of us react to Indian music. We just don't understand it—you know, after a while it becomes a din. Chinese music's even more difficult—Chinese opera. Japanese music, you know—very hard. Well, it's a cultural thing. We're just not accustomed to it."

It would be nice to be able to leave it at that. The trouble with leaving it at that is that even many musicians, who are accustomed to listening to much of the music written in the Fifties and Sixties and understand the principles according to which it was composed, still find it difficult to listen to, and do not like it very much.

Crumb characterizes the Fifties and Sixties as "a period which was involved with a lot of experimentation for its own sake, rather than being experimentation which supported some expressive interest. There are exceptions, but there was a sort of aridity, at least to my taste, and the whole emotive force of music was neglected, underplayed, or even ignored in some cases."

"A lot of post-Webernian music, the music written in the Fifties and Sixties," Wernick explains, "was based on Schoenberg's 12-tone method. A lot of it was based on methods of composition in which the notes were not governed by the composer at all, they were governed by some sort of formula set up ahead of time, consciously designed to take the personality out of music. On the other hand, there was aleatory music, in which it was pure chance that governed; the composer wrote nothing really." (Warren provides a good example of aleatory music: John Cage's *Do Something Useful for Twenty Minutes* concert, which he attended when he was in college. Cage sat on stage at a desk, writing letters or balancing his checkbook or something, while microphones picked up the scratching of his pen, the turning of pages, the occasional creaking of the chair. Cage at least seems to have intended a degree of humor. Stockhausen, on the other side, seems to have been distressed by the comic effects produced by some of his works. But let's not get into that.)

After Webern, what you got, it seems, was a hardening of Schoenberg's 12-tone techniques. "It purports not to be tonal," Wernick explains. (There is, it seems, no longer any adequate way of defining what the word *tonal* means; it used to refer to music written in a recognizable key—e.g., the music most people are used to—but now that almost nobody writes anything in a particular key, it can be used, it seems, to describe any music that does not make a deliberate and successful effort to avoid returning to a tonal "center." More on this later.)

"Some of the things that come out of it can't help being tonal," Wernick continues. (You see what I mean?) "But one of the things they try to do is to *avoid* tonality, as a matter of fact. Serialism is part of that. You can write atonal music without being serial, but serial music is usually atonal. Serialism is an extension of 12-tone. Twelve-tone has to do with the notes in a piece—how they're organized —and serial goes beyond that, it's a method of organizing everything, not just the notes, but the rhythms and the meters and the dynamics and the speeds. A tone row is like a scale—from C to B inclusive, for example, counting all the white notes and all the black notes. You can rearrange them in any order you want, and whatever order you rearrange them in is a row, and the idea is that you never repeat one until you do all 12. That's supposed to prevent any one of them from asserting itself as having any particular importance. And that's just the beginning of it. It can be a very rigid system in that, if you start fiddling around with those notes, you'll find that there are relationships that spring up among them so you can make rows that are four sets of relationships of threes— or three sets of relationships of fours— or divide it in half. Composers have found that they can make the second half of the row the same as the first half of the row, but transposed to a different level—and so the thing can turn back on itself. You can make tremendous games with it—it's wonderful *fun*." Wernick's tone unmistakably reflects his conviction that fun and games is not precisely the point of composing music.

Since he wrote his last serial work, in 1963, Rochberg has been a staunch critic of serialism

"What's happened, you see," Wernick says, "is that as this technique got more in the hands of theorists, the method became more important than the results, many times. And, in essence, any kind of a system which is too doctrinaire becomes anti-musical. That's what happened. It's pretty much finished now, that's the interesting thing. It's on its way out."

Dispiriting. You spend all this time trying to figure out the intricacies of tone rows and serialism only to find out that it's pretty much all over anyway.

Henahan concurs. "It's not *over* yet," he says. "Twelve-tone is still taught everywhere—as a certain kind of academic fugue once was. But the people coming out now tend not to use it. It's sort of thought to be yesterday's gardenia."

Continuing the analogy with fugue, he says, "It's a kind of discipline you can get into and like—you can go anywhere, and whatever else you can or can't do, you can always say, 'Well, at least I can write a fugue.' It's the same with 12-tone." He parallels the strictness of the serial method with the rise of the New Criticism in literature at roughly the same time. The New Critics narrowed the scope of respectable literary inquiry to the text of the poem. You were only allowed to talk about the words themselves. Curiosity about the poet's intention, the reader's response, the social context of the poem— or anything else beyond the text itself— was frowned on. "People get a little frightened of freedom," Henahan suggests. "They need a Gauleiter to help them out a little bit sometimes. It goes in cycles."

Though serialism may be "yesterday's gardenia," it's worth knowing a little about it—and about how strong it was— to see Crumb, Rochberg, and Wernick in context. Crumb, apparently, never paid it any attention. Wernick dabbled in it but "never took it very seriously." Rochberg is the only one of the three to have been a serious serialist—Henahan cites his *Serenata d'estate* as "one of the best 12-tone pieces," but it sounds to the untrained ear like a sort of subversive kind of 12-tone; it has, according to Eric Salzman, who wrote the liner notes, "a relaxed charm, a graceful swing, and an imaginative sense of instrumental sonority and fantasy sometimes missing from the usually severe serial music." He himself has written that at the beginning of his career he thought he had found in Schoenberg's method "the means to say what I wanted or had to. I was convinced of the historical inevitability of the 12-tone language—I felt I was living at the very edge of the musical frontier, of history itself." But since he wrote his last serial work, in 1963, he has been one of the method's strongest critics and has become increasingly interested in the possibilities offered by (more or less) old-style tonality.

Henahan calls him "one of the most important of contemporary composers in having the courage to repudiate 12-tone—to be a university composer and go against that style! Whether his music will hold up is another question, but I think it will. To see two people like Crumb and Rochberg break out of that— Carter, Boulez, Stockhausen, Sessions—it was a very strong cartel to go against. It couldn't have happened in one of the major music centers, it couldn't have happened in New York."

To say that Crumb, Rochberg, and Wernick stand outside of serialism—and have done so since well before it was fashionable—is not to say that they constitute a school. I have been warned about this on all sides. By now, probably even the hapless New York critic who once referred to them as "the Philadelphia school" agrees that that was a mistake.

For one thing, their music sounds entirely different.

I would hesitate to say so if Crumb hadn't said, "Sometimes I think the best way of writing about music is not on a technical plane, but maybe using metaphors, speaking in poetical terms in a very general sense, trying to find verbal analogues." But I keep thinking that Crumb's music—I'm thinking especially of *Makrokosmos*, Volume I, but, as Crumb says, "my music since 1962 has been all of a piece"—sounds like what you might hear if you left an amplified piano in a clearing in some Keatsian wood for a night, to be played at will by a personification of Night itself, a performer compounded out of nightwind and stars and unidentifiable rustlings and insect and animal voices and the occasional passing hamadryad. It is otherworldly. It sounds like no other music (except, apparently, that of its imitators, who, according to Henahan, are increasing).

This has partly to do with Crumb's use of unconventional instruments—tuned water glasses played with a violin bow, for example—and with his unconventional use of conventional instruments— running a chisel over the windings of a piano string to produce a glissando, or directing the performer to sing over the

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strings to create a resonance. He started this sort of thing in 1963, with Night Music I, which at one point directs one of the performers to lower a tam-tam into a tub of water to "bend" the sound.

I asked Crumb whether he started experimenting with sound possibilities because he felt limited by conventional instruments. "Well, I guess so," he said, sounding not entirely convinced. "What you want to express in the music depends on extending the resources in certain directions, and this seemed like a fruitful direction."

The distinctive character of his sound world also has to do partly with the composers who influenced him. "I was always interested in composers—early composers like Debussy—whose music is involved with the coloristic aspects of sound," he says.

But I keep thinking—and I'm not even sure exactly what I mean by this—that the way Crumb's music sounds has more to do with Crumb himself than with his unconventional instrumentation or with the influence of other composers. That may even be a truism. But from listening to the music, and from talking to him, one gets the impression that his music is translated to the page—no matter how arduously—directly from a part of his mind that is inaccessible to language. His music seems, somehow, quintessentially personal. Which is not to say that it's not accessible to audiences: Henahan says Crumb "has succeeded in getting to a lot of people who think they don't like contemporary music; they hear a Crumb piece, and they're suddenly mesmerized."

Crumb's music sounds almost like a natural—or supernatural—phenomenon, like, maybe, the "music of the spheres." Wernick's is harder to characterize, partly because I've heard less of it, but partly because it sounds more like what you expect music to sound like—it moves from point to point the way a classical or Romantic piece does—at the same time that its harmonies are recognizably contemporary. Wernick explains his method of composition as using what are, to a 19th-century ear, dissonances in such a way that they function as consonances.

'The three of us tend to be Romantics of a kind, our music is emotional,' Crumb says

"I'm interested in tonality," he says. "But the problem with that is that you can't define tonality. My concern is that one shouldn't put the definition of tonality in a box and associate it necessarily with 19th-century common practice, or with 18th-century common practice. I think it's possible within the context of 20th-century language to employ tonality as a compositional means. We have certain intervals and chords now which used to be considered quite dissonant—which are now considered quite consonant—and without reverting to the consonance that was prevalent in 18th- and 19th-century music. I think we can use the so-called dissonance of 20th-century music—the musical structures, the harmonic structures of 20th-century music—I think it's possible to use those in such a way that they produce a tonality of their own. That's what I tried to do in *Visions*. It's not in a key, it's not tonal in that sense. But I don't think there's any question but that it's a tonal work. Most of Crumb's music is tonal, but it sounds very different from my music, which is tonal. My music, which is tonal, sounds very different from Rochberg's music, which is tonal. We're all kind of focusing in on the hub of a wheel—but we're all out there on the edge, and we're all kind of looking in from different spots, so it comes out quite different.

How do you compose a piece of music?

GEORGE CRUMB: "I don't know that there's any short answer to that. It's a very slow process with me, and I have to do a lot of sketching, and many of my pieces stretch over years and are very slow in maturing—*Songs, Drones and Refrains of Death*, for example, was about a 10-year process. That was the longest torment. It involves testing ideas and much revision—it's like writing anything, I suppose."

GEORGE ROCHBERG: "Well, I tell you, this is maybe evasive, but a very nice lady once asked Brahms how he got the ideas for his works, and he said, 'Well, when I'm shining my shoes in the morning.' There are two impossible questions: why do you compose music and how do you compose music. The real process is indescribable. I don't think it lends itself to any kind of verbal pinning down."

RICHARD WERNICK: "Oh, that's almost impossible to get into. It really is. It's incredibly arcane. The process—what you're asking for is a chapter in a book. It varies with every piece. Essentially what it is is the working out of musical ideas. It's not like describing how you make a clay pot on a wheel; it's not a mechanical process. There's no set formula. Like a piece of music, the process has a beginning, a middle, and an end: the beginning is trying out and rejecting ideas, the middle is working out ideas, and the end is producing the piece—and even that doesn't always hold."

"To hear us talk about music," Wernick says, "you would find an enormous amount of agreement. We're interested in the same things musically pretty much. We have a vast common ground of likes and dislikes—and we tend to respect the same things. We all like music that's somehow grounded in tonality. We enjoy music that has some kind of emotional strength. The three of us enjoy the passionate aspect of music rather than the cool aspect of music. But when these things are projected on an individual work, it comes out quite differently, and that's a function of personality."

Crumb says nearly the same thing: "Compared with many styles being written, the three of us tend to be Romantics of a kind, our music is emotional. There are cooler types in the field—more classical, more constructional, more abstract."

Some of Rochberg's recent work—especially the Ricordanza and the second part of his Third String Quartet—should give no trouble even to somebody who's never heard anything after Beethoven. After he left serialism behind, in the early Sixties, he began to experiment with quotations or collages of traditional music. "It was my way of finding my way back," he says. "When I broke with the sort of strait-laced orthodoxy—12-tone, serial, whatever you want to call it—I couldn't, I simply couldn't just jump back into tonal music. It was a way of edging into it, backing into it. It was a kind of an arduous process, but after—I guess the last major work of quotation or collage was my Third Symphony—and I don't think I've done it to any degree since, and I'm certainly not interested in doing it now. In other words, I reached the point where I said, 'Now you're going to try to write your own tonal music, come what may.' "

Talking about his post-serial work, Rochberg says, "In order to correct the situation, it's as though you have to find your way back out of a cul-de-sac, right? So you sort of think very hard about where it all started from—because you have to work your way back to the starting point and then begin to understand, well, what happened.

"I always find it interesting to see these corroborations of what I've been thinking for a long time popping up more and more now, like daisies on a lawn. Ten years ago I was saying this, and no one would have believed that, by now, architects would be rejecting the Bauhaus, that painters and sculptors would be going back to the figure. They're re-thinking their situation—and for a composer it means writing melodies again—tunes!—becoming expressive again—*Romantic* if it's in fact necessary.

"How does anything get into the repertoire?" he asks. "Not by election, not by committee choice. If it doesn't *speak*, particularly to performers, they're not going to be interested. And it doesn't matter how brilliantly it's organized, or on the basis of what fantastic set of intellectual principles or esthetic—if performers don't respond to it, they're not going to spend time learning it. If a player says, 'Gee, that feels good, I liked playing that,' then you've convinced him. Because players are not intellectuals—why should they be, really why should *anyone* be when you come right down to it? People who go to hear an orchestral or a chamber concert—why impose upon them the necessity to be philosophers or estheticians or theorists or anything? They're people who *need* music as a part of their lives. I'm not particularly concerned with how deep their *knowledge*—quote, unquote—of music is, I'm concerned with how intensely they feel what they've experienced—that's the key. I don't think it's worth while to concern yourself with the intellectual aspects of composition and sort of ignore or disconnect that from the expressive level.

"The situation's become so insane," he continues. "There are so many people who feel that unless something is a departure—an obvious departure from what happened yesterday or the day before yesterday—it's not worth paying attention to. It doesn't matter in what way it departs or, again, what it has to say, but only that this guy has done something that no one ever thought of doing. In other words, we arrive at the condition of innovation for its own sake. I don't think art and innovation are necessarily related at all—that makes me out a real radical conservative.

"When everything's acceptable nothing is acceptable, isn't that so?" he asks. "Nothing's valuable. And what do I mean by valuable? I mean something I can live with as part of my life as a musician and as a human being in a world which has gone mad, something which gives stability and continuity and a feeling that, in fact, I am practicing being human in the best way I know how. And so I'm not just flying off in all directions at once and just being innovative for the sake of attracting attention to myself. I am practicing the art of composing in the hardest way I know how, the old-fashioned way.

"There are people, I'm well aware of it, who view what I'm doing as a real cop-out, to use the vernacular. There are others who see great sense in it. I'm not particularly concerned—I have to do what I feel is consistent with my view of what I consider music to be as an art, as an expression of being human and being a musician. I can't shape that to every passing point of view. Because then you lose yourself, you just give yourself away, and everyone's opinion counts as much as yours."

Of the search for originality, Rochberg says, 'What difference does it make who wrote what?'

Speaking of Ricordanza, he says, "It's strange—I couldn't just write music like that any time I feel like it. It's not easy to write really convincing tonal music with no concession to what happened after 1860 or 1870."

In his recent work, Rochberg seems to be working toward a rapprochement of 20th-century idiom with the language of 19th-century tonality. "In the 20th century," he says, "there've been some amazingly beautiful things produced—which are not cast in the mold of the 19th or 18th century but are true, representative 20th-century works. But this happened before 1945, before the end of the Second World War, when, I think, the adventure of 20th-century art was entirely believable for those who practiced it. The doubts, the crumbling, crushing questions, came in after the end of the Second World War, and that's where we are now. Bartók's generation—Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Berg—they could believe in this, because most of them, in a sense, didn't think they were breaking with tradition. They were *extending* tradition. After the Second World War, you get men like Boulez who say, 'Let's practice amnesia—we're done with this, we're finished, now we have to make the marriage of the machine and the mind'—and it's just absolute nonsense.

"And this whole idea that you've got to be unique, original—that idea has destroyed more people, just the search. It's the narrowest egoism. In the end, what difference does it make who wrote what?

"I'll tell you what I love," Rochberg says. "In the Kabuki theater and the Noh play tradition, actors, once they've attained a real grasp of a certain tradition, a certain way of acting, can adopt an earlier name—the name may go back to the 1600s. An actor can now call himself 'Tazaki Ten.' So there are people who are 'Tazaki Two' and 'Tazaki Three' and 'Tazaki Eleven' and 'Tazaki Fifteen' and so on, and their personal names have been to all intents and purposes—not *erased*—but simply set aside. In other words, they acknowledge that they belong to this tradition and that their person is of no importance in carrying out the tradition. They only happen to be the historical accident that is continuing the tradition—and that is something that would be marvelous, if the West would ever adopt that. We'd get away from all this *idiocy*—you know, John Cage, and Boulez, and Stockhausen—all these people tormenting themselves and each other—and *us*—with their *scream* for innovation and originality and so on. And it's all come to naught, because human life isn't lived that way. Whether in society or art. I don't believe so.

"We have to get back to producing art in a serious way, where, as a craftsman, you know that you're building something which is, at least metaphorically, for all time—10,000 years from now will sound as fresh and as good as, let's say, Beethoven sounds to us 150 years after he composed it. That's got to be the goal.

"I mean, fine, if I write a piece of music—or if John Doe writes a piece of music—in which by some happy accident some new use of some old means emerges. Great. Wonderful. But that's not the reason for having written the piece in the first place, that's only incidental. I mean, it seems to me that the real reason to write that piece is that John Doe has something so urgent—burning—that he's got to put down, that he simply must do that. Can't help himself. It's a compulsion, it's a necessity, without it, you know, he can't *live*. That's the way he breathes. That's what produces art. And, then, that, combined with this madly obsessive love of the *craft*, of the tradition—to know that you're only the latest *millimeter* added to this long line, and the hope that if you can be *half as good* as the best of those people who represent that line—now we're talking about, *I* think, art, and being an artist. That's what it means to me. Who *cares* whether you're unique?"

I asked Rochberg to suppose that the tradition of the Japanese theater were to be adopted in Western music—whose name would he take?

"Great!" he said, laughing. Then, becoming immediately serious, "Oh, I don't dare utter it. No, at this point it's still too remote. I have my private dreams, naturally. But I don't think I'll live long enough to achieve it. In order to achieve it—it's like a handicap race, right?—oh, I'd have to live another 150 years. Oh, I've been accused of *sounding* like him. That's one thing. But for me to feel that we could meet in heaven and have a conversation as equals—that's something completely different.

"But, for me, this is the longing."