

THE CONTEMPORARY GROUP

PROGRAM NOTES
Wednesday, April 24, 1974

Arnold Schönberg: PIERROT LUNAIRE (1912)

Pierrot Lunaire is generally recognized as Schönberg's most important work. In the context of its year of completion, it is revolutionary primarily for two reasons: (1) the utilization of *Sprechgesang* ("speech-song," a recitation with exactly notated rhythm and approximately notated pitch); (2) the extreme economy of means employed, as contrasted with the sprawling forms and gargantuan orchestras fashionable at the time (and exemplified by many of Schönberg's own earlier works).

Pierrot consists of three cycles of seven pieces each, the shortest only thirteen measures long. Each piece accompanies the voice with a different combination of instruments, chosen from among the eight played by the five instrumentalists.

George Crumb: ANCIENT VOICES OF CHILDREN (1970)

Ancient Voices of Children is part of an extended cycle of vocal compositions based on poetry of Federico Garcia Lorca. Earlier works in this cycle include *Night-Music I* (1963); four books of *Madrigals* (1965-69) (a recently-released recording, Turnabout/Vox TVS 34523, features Elizabeth Suderburg and the University of Washington Contemporary Group); *Songs, Drones, and Refrains of Death* (1968); and *Night of the Four Moons* (1969).

In composing *Ancient Voices*, Crumb has drawn on a variety of unrelated stylistic elements in his search for musical images to enhance and reinforce the imagery of Lorca's poetry, which Crumb feels is concerned "with the most primary things: life, death, love, the smell of the earth, the sounds of the wind and the sea."

The texts have been excerpted by the composer from longer poems, and arranged in a sequence which suggested to him a "larger rhythm" in terms of musical continuity. "Dances of the Ancient Earth" and "Ghost Dance" are instrumental dance-interludes, rather than commentaries on the text.

The instruments employed were chosen for their particular timbral potentialities, and as in *Pierrot*, each vocal piece has a different instrumental combination accompanying it. Some of the more unusual tone-colors featured are the toy piano (in the fourth song), musical saw (second song), harmonica (fourth song), and mandolin, which has one set of strings tuned a quarter-tone low in order to give a special pungency to its tone. The three percussionists perform on a wide variety of instruments, including Tibetan prayer stones and Japanese temple bells. In addition, the instrumentalists are frequently called upon to sing, shout and whisper.