

Symmetry, Thematic Transformation, Quotation in George Crumb's *Eine Kleine
Mitternachtmusik*

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines George Crumb's use of symmetry and asymmetry, thematic transformation, and quotation in his 2001 solo piano work, *Eine Kleine Mitternachtmusik*. The paper reviews these compositional hallmarks as displayed in other works by Crumb, and offers an analysis of *Mitternachtmusik*, thereby revealing these elements in the piece

for my mother

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Introduction

Thelonious Monk's "Round Midnight" is the most recorded jazz composition by any jazz musician—there are nineteen recordings made by Monk himself, and over a hundred by others. Although Monk recorded it numerous times in different settings and renditions, and while it was the recording made with his quintet that was added to the Grammy Hall of Fame, it was not Monk's recording that first launched it to fame. According to Thomas Fitterling, Monk wrote the tune when he was eighteen years old.¹ In 1944, Cootie Williams and His Orchestra recorded it, and it became popularized as the group's theme song. There are conflicting accounts as to whether or not Williams modified the tune or kept it intact, but Monk and Williams both share credit for the copyright.

Since then, the tune has become subject to multiple modifications. In 1946, Dizzy Gillespie added an introduction that became so popular that Monk altered and adapted it to his own performance. Monk then recorded it himself in 1947. Taken by the melody, Bernie Hanighen added lyrics to the tune, and the song was recorded in 1949. The tune achieved even greater popularity among the masses after Miles Davis's performance at the 1955 Newport Jazz Festival, which resulted in Davis's contract with Columbia Records and a release of the recording in 1956 on the LP *Round About Midnight*. The tune even made it to the silver screen, first in the 1971 film *The Omega Man* and then as the title for the 1986 film *Round Midnight*.

In 2001, thanks to Italian pianist Emanuele Arciuli, "Round Midnight" received twenty-one additional renditions. Arciuli, who has established himself as a huge proponent of American music, commissioned a group of composers to write variations

¹ Thomas Fitterling, *Thelonious Monk: His Life and Music*, (Berkeley Hills Books, 1997), 25-27.

based on the theme in homage to Monk. The list of composers included Frederic Rzewski, Milton Babbitt, John Harbison, Aaron Jay Kernis, George Crumb, and David Crumb, among others, as well as jazz composers Eric Reed, Uri Caine, and Fred Hersch. The project became known as the *Round Midnight Variations*, and Arciuli premiered the collection at the Miller Theater at Columbia University in 2002.²

George Crumb's variation stands apart from the rest not only because of his compositional style, but because Crumb was the only composer to expand the project into an entire suite—most of the variations by the others last between two and four minutes. Crumb states, "I have long been an admirer of Thelonious Monk's famous jazz melody '*Round Midnight*...I was immediately attracted to the idea of an homage to Monk but found my conception expanding to include a whole suite of short pieces. The result was *Eine Kleine Mitternachtmusik* ('A Little Midnight Music'), completed in 2001, and subsequently premiered and recorded by Mr. Arciuli."³

In his article titled, "Music: Does It Have a Future?" Crumb acknowledges the influence of jazz on twentieth century composition, and the inevitability and importance of "cross-fertilization" between musical cultures, both historically and geographically. He states that "one very important aspect of our contemporary musical culture—some might say the supremely important aspect—is its extension in the historical and geographical senses to a degree unknown in the past." In other words, the contemporary composer now has far-reaching access to music of the past as well as music of different cultures around the world. According to Crumb, "this awareness of music in its largest sense—as a world-wide phenomenon—will inevitably have enormous consequences for

² Allan Kozinn, "Music Review; Many-Faceted Dreams of That Time Round Midnight," *The New York Times*, November 21, 2002.

³ George Crumb, program notes.

the music of the future...I sense that it will be the task of the future to somehow synthesize the sheer diversity of our present resources into a more organic and well-ordered procedure.”

Crumb goes on to state, “The development of new instrumental and vocal idioms has been one of the remarkable phenomena of recent music. There undoubtedly have been many contributing factors: the influence of folk instrument techniques; the influence of jazz, and, later, rock techniques.” He also writes, “Perhaps we have come to think of ourselves as philosophically contemporaneous with all earlier cultures. And it is probable that today there are more people who see culture evolving spirally rather than linearly. Within the concentric circles of the spiral, the points of contact and the points of departure in music can be more readily found.”⁴

Crumb finds himself in the middle of the spiral in *Mitternachtmusik*. The work fuses jazz and Monk’s theme with Crumb’s harmonic language, but also engages with the past, interacting with European and American idioms and motifs. Through his use of symmetry, thematic transformation, and quotation, Crumb places himself at the center of a three-way interplay between Monk’s tune, American popular music, and European tradition.

⁴ George Crumb, “Music: Does It Have a Future?” *George Crumb: Profile of a Composer*, (C.F. Peters Corporation, 1986), 16.

Symmetry

The works of George Crumb are often characterized by spacious sonic worlds and suspended, seemingly free-form timbres. This is the magic of his music that immediately strikes listeners; Crumb evokes sounds and special effects that go above and beyond the expected timbral realms of each instrument he writes for, and arranges these sounds in a boundless, timeless ether, like a wizard conjuring powers and spells from thin air. Given his history as a pianist, this is a clear hallmark of the influence of two of his most admired composers, Chopin and Debussy. The most apparent example in Chopin's music is his paradoxical use of a metrical left-hand accompaniment beneath free, quasi-improvisatory melodic lines in the right hand—one only needs to look as far as his Nocturnes. Debussy's music continues this aesthetic of Chopin, building upon this illusion of metric liberty as well as harmonic range.

However, at the heart of Chopin and Debussy's works is a strong adherence to structure and symmetry. In the music of Chopin, there is a clear tie to traditional forms and organization. To cite his Nocturnes again, most follow a typical ternary form, and though the phrases convey length and freedom, they do not deviate from regular metric parameters. Much of Debussy's music also conforms to traditional formal practices. On a more minute level, Edward Pearsall writes, "Debussy was one of the first composers to incorporate symmetrical collections—quintal chords, whole-tone scales, and the like—into his music." As Pearsall states in his own paper, Debussy's influence plays a large role in the development in the music of Bartók, and in turn, Crumb.⁵

⁵ Edward Pearsall, "Symmetry and Goal-Directed Motion in Music by Béla Bartók and George Crumb," *Tempo* Vol. 58 No. 228 (April 2004), 39.

Crumb's music, while at first glance nebulous and vast, is built upon a network of large and small structures and a foundational dichotomy of symmetry and asymmetry. According to Pearsall, it is this dichotomy of symmetry versus asymmetry and equilibrium versus disequilibrium that gives Crumb's music direction and drama. He states "asymmetry...constitutes a more 'dissonant' structure, one that produces tension. Asymmetry resists symmetry, while symmetry seeks to overcome asymmetry. The ebbing and flowing between these two audibly distinct structures, then, can be interpreted as a motion away from repose ('consonant' symmetry) and back again."⁶

This is a hallmark of Crumb's music, and is apparent in his earliest published work, the Sonata for Solo Cello, written in 1955 while Crumb was in Berlin on a Fulbright scholarship. At the time, he was also still a student at the University of Michigan under Ross Lee Finney, who was, like Crumb's mother, a cellist. The most perceivable use of symmetry occurs in the overall layout of the movements. The Sonata is composed of three movements, each associated with Baroque traditions; the two outer movements, the Fantasia and Toccata, act as "'free' forms," framing the central Theme and Variations, which is itself a five-part form.

Crumb establishes symmetry and foreshadows the arch of the piece in the first gesture of the first movement; a soft, pizzicato chord strummed upward, composed of a D-sharp, B, D, and A, opens the piece, followed by a faster succession of chords strummed downward that grow louder and veer around the pitch center created in the first chord—the open fifth remains constant as the sixth on the bottom of the chords move—and is then punctuated by the return of the soft opening chord, again strummed upward.

⁶ Pearsall, "Dialectical Relations Among Pitch Structures," *George Crumb & The Alchemy of Sound*, Colorado College Music Press (2005), 63.

The pizzicato chords are contrasted by a monophonic melody, this time played with the bow. Edith Borroff points out the large and small-scale importance of this interplay: “the opening subject...is a miniature ABA (chord, series of chords, chord), which itself becomes an A in the dialogue with the monophonic subject, B, which is also a miniature ABA form; the dialogue enlarges as ABAB, and itself becomes an A in the three-movement whole.” According to Borroff, “The structural principles are quickly established: short subjects in alternation; delineation of character by texture and rhythm, pitch areas of focus rather than key centers, and performance style (pizzicato, arco; loud, soft).” The movement concludes with pizzicato chords, returning to the opening timbre and completing the arch.

As stated, the second movement is a five-part form: a theme, three variations, and a coda. The theme, according to Borroff, “exploits the dotted rhythm of the previous movement...[and] is a modified Baroque format of two short units (seven plus eight measures).”⁷ The three variations, in particular the second, form the central crux of the work. The tempo of the theme—*Grazioso e delicato*—is accelerated in the first variation with its marking of *Un poco più animato* and constant, moving sixteenth notes. This creates a drive towards the second variation—the center of the piece—where the tempo is then pushed to *Allegro possibile e sempre pizzicato*. The second variation not only echoes elements of the first movement in its use of pizzicato—also beginning with a strummed chord—but also in its freer, mercurial pulse; the first bar begins in 6/8 but the subsequent bars constantly shift meters. The third variation breaks from the acceleration of the previous movements, decreasing the frenetic energy, and the coda, which is a shortened version of the theme, concludes the movement.

⁷ Edith Borroff, *Three American Composers*, University Press of America (1986), 199-205.

The third movement returns to an ABA form. The slow introduction opens with a C-octave, and the music quickly drives towards the *Allegro*. In the climax, there is a return to the chord of the first movement, this time centering around a fifth composed of C and G rather than D and A. The movement concludes with a descent back to the C-octave that opened the movement.

Borroff states, “The relative tonal ambiguity of the Fantasia and Toccata, along with their common subjects, creates a focus of stability in the middle movement. The cumulative succession of small sections that become members of similar forms in a larger pattern, is perceivable and successful.” She goes on to state that “it is an interesting technique for the 1950s; integrated but not serial, vitalized by pulls to contrasting tones but not tonal, dependent upon process but not on progression. The effect is of crystallization: the organic combining of smaller into larger segments, while maintaining clarity at the several levels.”⁸

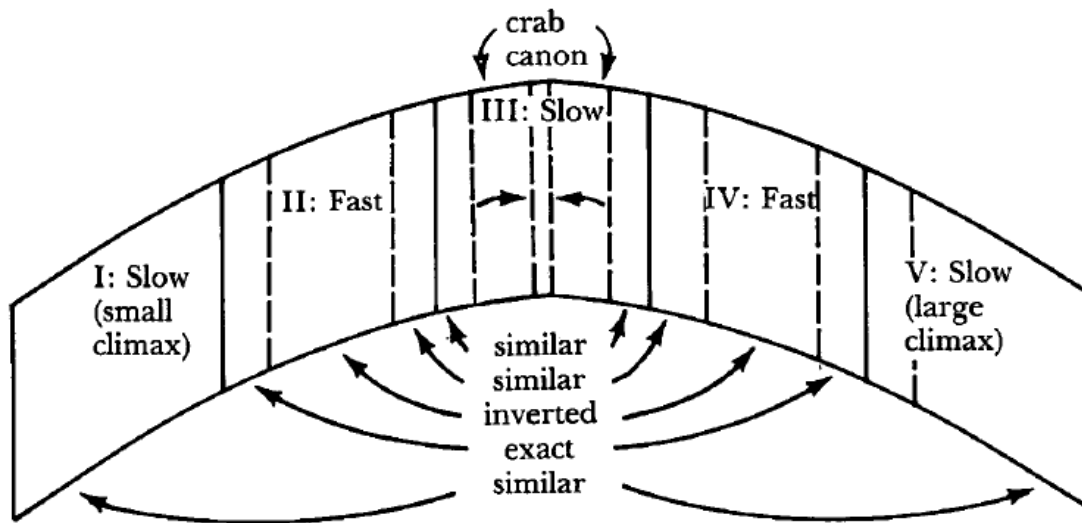
Crumb expands upon this framework in his *Five Pieces for Piano*, his earliest composition for solo piano, written in 1962. Like his Sonata for Solo Cello, this work is made up of an odd number of movements, or pieces, forming an arch that is neatly laid out in David Burge’s diagram. The first and last pieces, both slow and free—the first piece is marked *Quasi improvvisando* and the last is marked *Senza misura, liberamente*—frame the collection. Borroff states, “as in the cello sonata, the instability of the outer movements throws focus to the center three, all of which are ABA forms.”⁹

Asymmetrical rhythmic groupings are prevalent throughout these two pieces—accelerating and slowing repetitions of five, thirteen, fifteen, and seventeen notes, etc.—

⁸ Borroff, 199-205.

⁹ Ibid, 206.

lending to their improvisatory nature. In addition to their tempos and rhythms, the outer pieces can be characterized by their timbre, as both involve sounds produced on the keys and inside of the piano—pizzicato, tremolos, harmonics, and the use of a paper clip. Both pieces also draw from the same pitch content—“the pitch-cell groups that open the first piece are used to round off the fifth.”¹⁰



Burge’s chart of *Five Pieces for Piano*

In contrast, the second and fourth pieces are fast and played almost entirely on the keys. These pieces are further interrelated as “the main portion of the fourth piece is a free inversion of the second, the rhythms remaining exactly the same; also, the short introduction of the second piece is almost exactly repeated as the epilogue of the fourth, and the introduction of the fourth is similar to the epilogue of the second.”¹¹

The third piece is the center of the arch. Marked *Notturmo – sempre pizzicato*, the piece returns to a slow tempo, as in the first and fifth pieces. It is also played entirely inside of the piano. Particularly noteworthy is the construction of the movement itself; the main section is a crab canon—the second half of the piece repeats the first half, but in

¹⁰ David Burge, *Twentieth Century Piano Music*, Schirmer Books (1990), 213.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

retrograde. The piece is 17 measures long and the high E in the middle of m. 9 therefore acts not only as the central hinge of the canon and the piece, but of the entire work. As Borroff states, “Small forms are used as microcosms of larger structures,” just as they were in the Sonata for Solo Cello—palindromic tendencies become a major compositional fingerprint in Crumb’s music.¹²

According to Burge, Crumb contrasts the large-scale plan of the overall form with his pitch choices. “Crumb is extraordinarily economical in his choice of notes throughout the *Five Pieces*. A three-note row [G-sharp, A, and B-flat] and its transpositions are used to construct every sound in the piece.” These pitches are immediately introduced in the very first bar, and are “transposed and combined freely, [acting as] the building block of the entire set, thereby giving it extraordinary harmonic consistency.”¹³ Crumb further enhances this underlying simplicity of pitch with his expanded timbral palette and arsenal of extended piano techniques. Crumb’s treatment of motivic cells will be discussed later.

The music of Béla Bartók profoundly influenced Crumb, and Pearsall highlights one of many instances in Bartók’s *Mikrokosmos*, Vol. IV, no. 94, “From the Island of Bali.” The opening motive of the piece is formed by a minor second, perfect fourth, and minor second (<+1, +5, +1>), “which itself represents a symmetrical structure in pitch space.” This motive is then immediately transposed, inverted, and supplemented with additional pitches. “Taken together, the two pitch collections in bb. 1 and 2 form a one-octave octatonic scale. This symmetrical scale...projects a 1-2 interval series above and below C-sharp, the axis of inversion.”¹⁴

¹² Borroff, 208.

¹³ Burge, 214.

¹⁴ Pearsall, “Symmetry and Goal-Directed Motion in Music by Béla Bartók and George Crumb, *Tempo* Vol. 58 No. 228 (April 2004), 33.

Pearsall examines Crumb's use of symmetry on a more minute level, analyzing pitch structures and their transformations. He states that "Crumb's 'La luna está muerta, muerta' ... from *Night of the Four Moons*, for example, contains several symmetrical pitch collections, arranged in the manner of a balanced arch-form...the pitch sets in the first half of the composition...are presented in reverse order—and, hence, upside down—in the second half, transferring symmetry into the linear dimension; the events in the second half of the piece, that is, mirror those in the first half, just as the intervals above the pitch axis mirror those below it in each of the pitch collections."¹⁵

In "Beta Cygni," the second movement of *Makrokosmos*, Book IV, Pearsall points out an instance in which "two ordered pitch-interval motives...engage equilibrium and disequilibrium on a smaller scale." The first motive, formed by C, D, and F (<+2, +3>), is quickly transposed and inverted as G, F, and D. Taken separately, these two fragments are asymmetrical, but in their close proximity, combined as C, D, F, G, they form a symmetrical group: <+2, +3, +2>.¹⁶

Another example of this symmetrical pitch collection occurs in the first movement of *Madrigals*, Book I. The soprano opens with a motive composed of A, D-sharp, and E (<-6, +13>). In m. 2, this motive is transposed and inverted as G-sharp, D, and C (<+6, -13>). Again, each individual motive is asymmetrical, but when taken together as C-sharp, D-sharp, G-sharp, A, D, and E, they form a symmetrical four-note

¹⁵ Pearsall, "Symmetry and Goal-Directed Motion in Music by Béla Bartók and George Crumb, *Tempo* Vol. 58 No. 228 (April 2004), 32.

¹⁶ Pearsall, "Dialectical Relations Among Pitch Structures," *George Crumb & The Alchemy of Sound*, Colorado College Music Press (2005), 65.

collection (C-sharp, D-sharp, D, and E) with G-sharp and A as the central axis: <+2, +5, +1, +5, +2>.¹⁷

According to Pearsall, closure and continuity also create in Crumb's music a "dialectical opposition, one that incorporates inter-opus associations." He states that "closure in Crumb's music is often signified by completeness," and again cites "La luna está muerta, muerta," from *Night of the Four Moons*—"the first five note set [in m. 12] is asymmetrical...[but] the same collection returns at the end of the movement where E completes the collection, thus creating symmetry and providing closure." In contrast, "Los muertos llevan alas de musgo" from *Madrigals*, Book I, remains open-ended at the end. Pearsall points out that the piece "begins with a symmetrical collection consisting of E-flat, A, D, and G-sharp, all played by the contrabass...The collection...occurs near the end of the piece and marks the return of symmetry." However, at the end, an "F is added in the vibraphone part, and the collection itself is fragmented...This has the effect of pushing the piece past its ending."¹⁸

These multiple dimensions of symmetry and asymmetry permeate all of Crumb's music and feature heavily in his *Eine Kleine Mitternachtmusik*. This paper will examine how symmetry functions on both a macro and micro level throughout the work.

Like *Five Pieces*, *Eine Kleine Mitternachtmusik* is a suite made up of an odd number of pieces—in this case, nine—with each piece alternating between symmetry and asymmetry, stability and instability. As we shall see, the odd-numbered movements are the most stable and deal the most directly with the 'Round Midnight' theme, while the

¹⁷ Pearsall, 66.

¹⁸ Ibid, 74-75.

even-numbered movements are the most fleeting, creating a constant interaction between order and disorder, and giving the music direction and drama.

Unlike the Sonata for Solo Cello and *Five Pieces for Piano*, in which the outer movements are less stable, the first and last pieces of *Mitternachtsmusik* are quite stable, and act as organizational bookends, framing the work as a whole. They are both slow—number 1, “Nocturnal Theme” is marked *poco adagio, esitante*, and number 9, “Midnight Transformation” is marked as “a slow ballad tempo, languidly,” both specified as quarter note = ca. 50. The pieces both present full iterations of the “Round Midnight” theme and its E-flat minor tonality, which lasts eight bars, with a suggestive additional bar of residual soundings. It is as if Crumb opens the work with a straightforward eight-bar phrase, and then teases and foreshadows what is to come with the extra bar, slightly tipping the scale towards asymmetry. Both movements are quite soft, staying in the realm of *ppp* to *pp* with the loudest dynamic being *mp*.

The second and eighth pieces, “Charade” and “Cadenza with Tolling Bells,” immediately contrast the calm of the outer movements; both are highly active and loud, especially the latter. The second piece, marked *più mosso; scorrevole, prismatico* opens with an arpeggiation that at first continues the E-flat tonality of the Theme, but this time as E-flat major. This quickly leads into fast, wild arpeggiations of fourths, derived from the Thelonious Monk motive at the beginning of the work. Yet amidst the sudden unruly energy, there is an underlying sense of order in that the piece is dividable into two equal sections.

The eighth piece, marked “Very free,” begins by modifying the opening arpeggiation of Monk’s theme. Like the second piece, the eighth piece is a series of free,

accelerating gestures, but is also dividable into equal halves even though there are no bar lines. Both pieces end with a gradual decrease in energy to lead into the following movements.

The third and seventh pieces, “Premonition” and “Blues in the Night,” return to slow tempos—the third is *molto lento* and the seventh is *molto languido*. These movements are slow meditations on the theme. For example, while the second piece fragments the main motive of the work, the third piece reconstructs it in an altered state; the motive is reworked into chords with truncated intervals—this will be discussed later. The seventh piece also begins with a clear statement of the principal motive.

The fourth and sixth movements are the most wild and unruly of the suite. They are both fast *scherzos* that lack the same degree of symmetry of the other pieces—though it is not completely absent—but serve a symmetrical purpose by balancing the other pieces and framing the central movement. Both pieces also make use of pedal resonance through employing the *sostenuto* pedal.

“Incantation,” the fifth piece of *Mitternachtmusik*, is the focal point. Though it is not exactly a crab canon like the third movement of *Five Pieces*, it is palindromic by way of its phrase lengths and transpositions of the key motives—both of which will be discussed later. While the precise center of the movement is not as clearly delineated as the center of the third piece of *Five Pieces*, the centrality of “Incantation” is important since it represents the clearest fusion and fruition of Monk’s and Crumb’s motives, a transformation that begins in the first bar of the “Nocturnal Theme.” “Incantation” also returns to a slow tempo—also like the third piece of *Five Pieces*—forming, together with the first and last pieces, one of the three structural pillars of the work.

Extended technique also plays a role in the overall layout of the movements. While most of the pieces, with the exception of the second, fourth, and sixth, use extended techniques, only the odd-numbered movements use pizzicato in a functional way—as part of the harmonies. Additionally, the first, fifth, and ninth pieces—the pieces with the most stable use of thematic material—are the only pieces that contain the rhythmic percussive motive played on the metal crossbeams inside of the piano. This functionality of extended technique is particularly important to acknowledge; as Burge states, Crumb employs these techniques “without allowing the inside-the-piano sounds to give the impression of being special effects or gimmicks.” They are well integrated, and in the case of *Mitternachtmusik*, serve an organizational purpose.¹⁹

Each individual movement of *Mitternachtmusik* displays elements of symmetry and equilibrium versus asymmetry and disequilibrium on a formal scale as well more minute levels. In “Nocturnal Theme,” the “Round Midnight” theme is an even eight-bar phrase, but there is an additional bar of extended technique that disturbs the equilibrium of Monk’s theme. This in turn makes the height of his theme (m. 5) the center of the arch of the piece, and creates tension between the even length of Monk’s theme and the uneven length of Crumb’s construction. At once, multiple forces are at odds—Monk’s theme is even, but Crumb’s arrangement, though uneven, creates symmetry. The meters are also in constant flux, alternating between 6/4 and 7/4, with three measures of 5/4, concluding in 7/4.

On a deeper level, interaction between symmetry and asymmetry is established in the first measure, with a ghostly *glissando* strum on the strings. The downward strum is composed of two superimposed chords: E-flat minor—which is the tonal center of

¹⁹ Burge, 214.

“Round Midnight”—on the bottom and A-minor on top. The contrasting tonal centers foreshadow the transformation of Thelonious Monk’s “Round Midnight” theme and its interactions with Crumb’s compositional methods. But while the two chords seem oppositional, together they form an four-note symmetrical collection much like the first movement of *Madrigals*, Book I—E-flat, G-flat, C, and E, with A and B-flat as its central axis: <+3, +2, +1, +2, +3>.

1. Nocturnal Theme
 Tema - poco adagio, esitante (♩ = ca. 50)

Amplified Piano

depress silently and secure with sost. Ped.

The downward strum is quickly balanced by Monk’s “Round Midnight” theme composed of an ascending arpeggiated B-flat, E-flat, F, and B-flat that descends to G-flat (<+5, +2, +5, -4>). Crumb extrapolates the symmetrical ascending group <+5, +2, +5>, deriving the basic building block for the work from Monk’s theme. Its transformations—which will be discussed in more detail later—and the interactions relative to Monk’s theme form the impetus of the work.

As previously stated, extended technique plays a pivotal role in supporting and disturbing balance, and in this first piece, Monk’s theme is in constant dialogue with Crumb’s evocative effects. In the first two measures, two fragments of “Round

Midnight” are interspersed with three fragments of Crumb’s inner piano sounds—the downward E-flat minor/A-minor *glissando*, an upward sweep of the strings, and a rhythmic percussive motive made up of a 2/5/2 rhythm. This odd-versus-even relationship is hinted at in the aforementioned pitches of the opening *glissando*. The formation is repeated in the next two measures, but begins to be dismantled in the remainder of the piece; after m. 5, the percussive motive does not return until m. 9. This creates another dichotomy of order and disorder, with the first four measures being clearly structured, and the last four measures after m. 5 being freer. However, at the same time, this also accentuates the traditional underpinnings of the piece and clarifies formal elements: the theme is an eight-bar phrase comprising two two-bar phrases and a longer four-bar phrase.

Also noteworthy is the number of times each effect occurs. The number of downward strums and upward sweeps is uneven—three strums of the E-flat minor/A-minor harmony versus five upward sweeps—but together they form an even number. The percussive motive appears to be a steady marker throughout the piece, occurring four times, but in its fourth and final iteration, it is fragmented, as the first two strikes are missing.

This fragmentation, which will be revisited later, leaves the end of the piece inconclusive and open-ended—a key aspect of Crumb’s music. According to Pearsall, this “inconclusiveness enhances the atmosphere of mystery...ideas are left hanging in the air so to speak, inviting the listener to supply his or her own meaning. Understood this way, the lack of closure constitutes a rhetorical marker in Crumb’s music, one that

engenders expectancy in the listener's imagination rather than frustration."²⁰ In this case, the inconclusiveness leaves listeners in wonder and sets up the surprise of the second piece.

“Charade” begins in sharp contrast to the “Nocturnal Theme”; the meditative calm of the first piece is immediately replaced with energized arpeggiations. The E-flat minor tonality of the first piece is also quickly dispelled by the E-flat major harmony that opens the second piece. But while the atmosphere appears to be more spontaneous and active than that of the first piece, the second is paradoxically more regular in its length; the piece is twenty-four measures in length, and is dividable into two twelve-bar phrases. Each twelve-bar phrase contains four measures of arpeggiated fourths, followed by eight measures of streaming minor seconds in the right hand and minor second chords in the left hand. Unlike “Nocturnal Theme,” there is no defining central moment in “Charade.” The piece is also played entirely on the keys.

The exchange between the fourths and the seconds is the most striking instance of counterbalancing in the piece and an interesting example of Crumb's proclivity for numerology. The two intervals are obviously extracted from the main motive of the work, and separated into the two main components of the piece. The phrase of seconds is longer than the phrase of fourths, creating an imbalance, but simple arithmetic reveals an interesting remedy: four measures of fourths translates to 4×4 , while eight measures of seconds translates to 8×2 — $4 \times 4 = 8 \times 2 = 16$.

The chords of the first phrase of fourths constitute a symmetrical group of pitches—bass notes E-flat, C, F, and D, or $\langle -3, +5, -3 \rangle$ re-ordered as C, D, E-flat, and F,

²⁰ Pearsall, “Dialectical Relations Among Pitch Structures,” *George Crumb & The Alchemy of Sound*, Colorado College Music Press (2005), 71-74.

theme fades and gives way to a free, mutated echo of the theme, which will be discussed later. As previously mentioned, the second phrase is the same, but transposed down a tritone. It is worth noting that tritones play an important role throughout the work; the interval is derived from the superimposed harmonies of the opening *glissando* chord of the first piece, and create imbalance against the fourths that permeate the work.

The third phrase acts as an interlude that exploits the fourths of the main motive of Monk's theme, much like "Charade." Crumb creates discord here by juxtaposing the fourths, which sound stable, with tritones. For example, at the start of the phrase, the right hand plays the fourths first, but the left hand interrupts with fourths transposed a tritone lower. This is accentuated by the *pizzicato* tones below, which also form a descending tritone (C-sharp and G). The latter half of the phrase follows, but this time the fragments of fourths are shortened and the left hand transposition interrupts sooner. The *pizzicato* tritone also ascends, countering the descending tritone. The *pizzicato* tones, when grouped together, form an even pitch collection: E, G, A-sharp, and C-sharp, or $\langle +3, +3, +3 \rangle$.

The fourth phrase of the piece is a culmination of the first two; both hands play the $2/3/2$ motivic chords, this time, descending, but as the second group of eighth notes arrive, Crumb superimposes another $2/3/2$, ascending in opposition. However, the point where the descending eighth note chords intersect with the ascending eighth note chords creates a focal point of symmetry—the $2/3/2$ motives superimposed produces a larger $5/2/5$ motive, creating a culmination of the motives of the first two phrases and echoing the intervals of the Monk motive, $\langle +5, +2, +5 \rangle$. The piece then trails off in a similar fashion to the first two phrases, this time in a $3/2/3$ grouping of triplets, that are

themselves composed of intervals <+3, +2, +3>. The ending continues the trend of the first two pieces, remaining inconclusive.

As previously stated, the fourth and sixth pieces are the chaotic scherzo movements, simultaneously disorderly and comedic to frame the more symmetrical, serious fifth piece. “Cobweb and Peaseblossom” is a slapstick onslaught of intervals that drunkenly feels around for elements of symmetry. The title, named after two of Titania’s fairies in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, hints at the comical dialogue of the piece. However, balance is never quite achieved; it is all a big tease.

The piece is marked *Vivace* and opens with two abrupt, loud bursts of minor seconds in contrary motion—the right hand descends (A, A-flat, G), while the left hand ascends to meet it (E, F, F-sharp), as if making a slight attempt at forming a symmetrical figure. This is echoed softly in the following bar, with the figure transposed down a tritone. The chromatic fragments are answered by a series of five quickly arpeggiated chords made up of major thirds, occurring with an extreme *crescendo*. These are then followed by a descending series of major seconds, and two measures of the loud bursts, this time made up of major thirds.

This sets the tone of the piece—a dialogue between small intervals (major and minor seconds) and larger intervals (thirds and fourths), enhanced and accentuated by varying rhythmic textures (quick bursts, dotted rhythms, and percussive thirty-second notes) and extreme dynamics. Inklings of symmetry are also hinted at in the percussive fourths at R. 12; the first fragment of fourths begins by descending loudly, and is answered by soft, ascending fourths, but this momentary balance is foiled by the two interrupting *ffz* chromatic bursts of the opening. The fourths make another attempt—this

time, the descending fourths are soft, and counter-balanced by quick, upward arpeggiated chords made up of fourths, but this is again cut off by the loud chromatic bursts.

As the piece continues, the lengths of fragments expand; mm. 42-45 contain the longest run of consecutive chromatic bursts, this time interrupted by a short fragment of percussive fourths. Mm. 50-53 contain the longest phrase of percussive fourths. The fourths then mutate into minor thirds in the right hand, and thirds and tritones outlined in the left hand—pitches C, F-sharp, A, and E-flat, or, $\langle +6, +3, +6 \rangle$ —counterbalancing the fourths. To conclude, the piece returns to the opening statement with slight modifications—the statement is extended with a coda that again ends unsettled.

The fifth piece, “Incantation,” is the centerpiece of *Mitternachtmusik*. It marks a return to a slower tempo—“slower and dramatically”—and to a more symmetrical form after the fourth piece, and though it lacks bar lines, there is a steady *ostinato* in the bass that makes the piece equally dividable (60 beats). There are four sections, each beginning with the opening motive of the “Round Midnight” theme, but they are not perfectly equal in length—the second and third sections are equal in length, but the first is slightly longer, while the fourth is slightly shorter—establishing another dichotomy between symmetry and asymmetry. The piece only uses the first five bars of Monk’s theme. The outer sections balance each other—short versus long—and the two equal middle sections highlight the center of the arch. Furthermore, the melodic lines of the outer sections both begin on E4, whereas the melodic lines of the center sections both begin on C5. In addition to the return of key thematic fragments from the “Nocturnal Theme,” “Incantation” also brings back some of the extended techniques, specifically the *glissando* over the strings, and the percussive motive.

The first section is composed of three phrases, and lasts sixteen beats, with an additional two introductory beats—(2+)6+4+6. The first phrase lasts six beats, and begins with the first two measures of the Monk's theme, but is interrupted by a fragment of minor seconds after the rising arpeggiation of the theme, disturbing the equilibrium of the theme as it is presented in the first piece. The second phrase lasts four beats, and picks up with the third measure of Monk's theme, but veers away from the fourth measure of the theme, instead leading into a percussive, accelerating repetition that is followed by motivic fragments composed of minor thirds and seconds reminiscent of the fragments introduced in the third piece. The third phrase, lasting six beats, introduces a new motive—the rapid chord figure—that alludes to the chords in the coda of the previous piece, and also foreshadows the tolling bells of the eighth piece. Following a recurrence of the accelerating repetition motive, the piece also makes use of a low harmonic cluster for the first time, something that returns in the seventh piece. The phrase is then punctuated by the rhythmic percussive motive on the crossbeams of the piano.

The second and third sections follow a formula similar to that of the first section, but the first phrase is shortened from six beats to four—the thematic fragment, which was interrupted in the first phrase, is completely cut short and does not proceed to the next thematic fragment. Instead, focus is drawn to fragmented transmutations, which will be examined later.

The fourth and final phrase rounds off the piece by returning focus to the thematic material; the extent of the thematic fragment from the first section is restored, albeit briefly interrupted again. However, this time it is not followed by the fragmented motivic

musings, but rather is closed off neatly with the *glissando* on the strings, the rhythmic percussive motive, and a final low harmonic bell, which, up until this point, is the most conclusive ending gesture so far.

The sixth piece, “Golliwog Revisited,” functions as another scherzo-type movement. Marked as a “Cakewalk tempo; jauntily, capriciously, grotesque,” it rudely disturbs the calm, trancelike state of the previous piece. Like “Cobweb and Peaseblossom,” it is wild and comical, but unlike the fourth piece, there is a higher degree of formal symmetry. The piece loosely—due to the placement of bars of rest—comprises three sections that form a very rough arch. The first and last sections are shorter and equal in length, and relatively stable when compared to the middle section, which is twice as long as the first and last sections, and extremely chaotic.

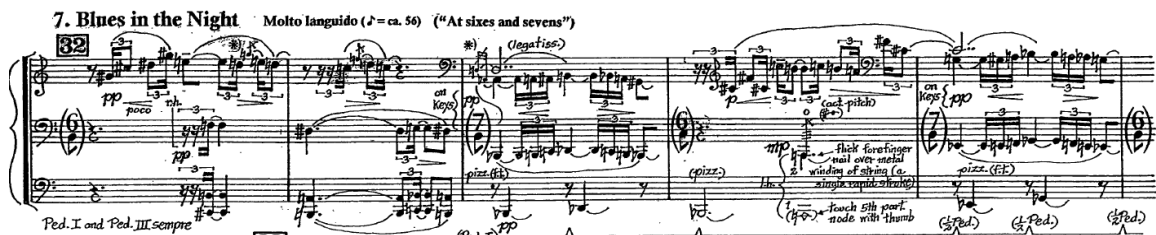
The first section is twelve bars in length, consisting of an eight-bar phrase and a four-bar phrase, each punctuated by a measure of rest. The piece opens with Crumb’s exaggerated, grotesque take on Debussy’s *Golliwogg’s Cakewalk*—Debussy’s tonality is removed, and all that is retained is the characteristic rhythm. The result is a bizarre, nightmarish outline that mimics and follows Debussy’s piece from its brash opening and fragmented hiccups to the actual melody, which occurs here in m. 9.

The section that follows is twice as long, and acts as a development, where fragments of Debussy’s *Cakewalk* framework are further dismantled, and its constituent motives superimposed and re-cobbled. Crumb also not only includes Debussy’s Wagner quote, including the fragment of *Tristan und Isolde*, but goes a step further, adding an additional fragment from the opera as well as a fragment of Strauss’s *Till Eulenspiegel*. The development escalates in a frenzied exchange between the Debussy and Strauss

quotes, spiraling out of control to cap off the chaos of the middle section before returning to the principle *Golliwogg* material.

Like the first section, the third section is twelve bars in length, but this time, the phrase lengths are reversed; the main melody comes first in an interrupted four-bar phrase, followed by the introductory loud attack and subsequent fragments, lasting eight measures. The ending is abrupt, but like the end of the fifth piece, unexpectedly resolute.

The seventh piece, “Blues in the Night” returns to a relaxed tempo, opening with a slow, swinging rendition of the Monk motive. The tempo is marked *Molto languido*, which hints at the work’s falling action towards the last piece of the set, which is also marked “languidly.” Particularly interesting about this piece is the small preface that follows the tempo marking: “At sixes and sevens.” The old English saying—referring to a state of confusion—sums up the paradoxical oppositions of the piece.



On a formal level, the piece can be organized into an ABA form where the outer sections frame the center to create an arch—both outer sections are six measures in length, while the center is seven. However, beneath the formal layout, the meters constantly shift between 6/8 and 7/8 without any apparent order, counterbalancing the symmetrical structure. For example, the first section begins with two measures of 6/8, then switches to 7/8, back to 6/8, 7/8, and then two measures of 6/8, the second of which elides with the second section. The third section follows the same random shifting of meters. The only traceable pattern seems to be that the 6/8 measures can last for two to

five measures, while the 7/8 measures last for one. To further accentuate this opposition, the melodic content is in constant flux; after the piece opens with Monk's motive, there is an open dialogue between wider intervals—mostly fourths—and smaller intervals—mostly minor seconds. Both of these intervals are key fragments of the main theme but, as in the second piece, are used as oppositional forces—the open fourths versus chromaticism.

To conclude, Crumb brings back the low harmonic bells, which are introduced in the fifth piece, to foreshadow the next piece, aptly named “Cadenza with Tolling Bells.” The piece also returns to an open-ended, inconclusive finish that leads into the eighth piece.

The eighth piece counteracts the arch of the seventh piece by reintroducing a degree of formal evenness; there are four phrases, but there are no bar lines or discernible pulse, and the phrases are not equal in length. However, there are elements of balance—the fourth phrase is much longer than the first three, and does employ a level of rhythmic regularity with the tolling bells, loosely counterbalancing the first three phrases, and counting down to midnight. The first three phrases, each beginning with a distorted mutation of Monk's theme, also contrast with the last in that they follow a general acceleration, pushing towards the climax at the downbeat of the last phrase, which begins the piece's deceleration and declining action.

The “Cadenza with Tolling Bells” acts as the final, climactic transmutation of Monk's theme—this will be discussed in more detail later—and a prelude to the ninth and final piece. “Midnight Transformation” is an almost note-for-note reiteration of “Nocturnal Theme.” However, after restating the theme in the first eight measures,

Crumb resolves to complete the unsettled ending of “Nocturnal Theme,”—he repeats the theme, but counterbalances the harmonic ambiguity of the first iterations of the theme by rounding out the harmonies and clarifying the E-flat minor tonality with the left hand *pizzicato* tones. The piece proceeds to finish on an E-flat major chord.

Fortunately, to maintain the dialectical intrigue of the work, rather than concluding with a straightforward eight-bar phrase, Crumb keeps elements of asymmetry and disequilibrium lurking in the texture. Though the “Round Midnight” theme is eight measures in length, the coda is made up of ten measures. As the theme unfolds for the last time, Crumb thrice interjects fragments of his own motivic musings—the first time after two bars of Monk’s theme, the second after the next two bars, and the third, and longest, after the final cadence. Each fragment of Crumb’s interjections occurs with a fermata, implying a freer sense of time. There are effectively eight orderly bars of Monk superimposed with three free bars of Crumb. The finishing stroke of genius is in this final measure; at last, Monk’s theme resolves and cadences on an E-flat major chord, but Crumb’s fragment extends past the cadence, fading into the ether. The ending is at once conclusive and inconclusive, final, yet open-ended—it is up to the listener to decide!

Thematic Transformation

As we have seen, symmetry is a key ingredient in the construction and fabric of Crumb's music. Symmetry and equilibrium interacts with asymmetry and disequilibrium to create oppositional forces that convey tension and act as catalysts for direction. However, these elements only form the foundation of each work. According to Pearsall, "Symmetry may constitute an important source of compositional material, but it does not by itself convey process. Important to this discussion, then, is the way in which symmetrical collections unfold over time. One of the most familiar means for creating melodic continuation in post-tonal music is motivic transformation, the gradual reshaping of a basic pitch-interval configuration through operations such as interval alteration, retrogression, inversion, and rotation. Combined with symmetry, motivic variation constitutes a powerful means for generating goal-directed motion in music that is not organized around tonic/dominant relations."²¹ Symmetry is merely a baseline and springboard for thematic transformation; the two elements work in tandem, with thematic transformation acting as a conduit in Crumb's network of symmetry and asymmetry, giving the music motion and direction.

The concept of thematic transformation is most often attributed to Franz Liszt, particularly in his Sonata in B minor. The piece is a landmark work of the nineteenth century displaying mastery of economy and variation; Liszt builds an entire large-scale work from distinct, compact motives, constantly developing and transforming these motives in a seamless flow, as the work has no separate movements, all the while staying within the bounds of sonata form. For example, the motive introduced at the beginning

²¹ Pearsall, "Symmetry and Goal-Directed Motion in Music by Béla Bartók and George Crumb, *Tempo* Vol. 58 No. 228 (April 2004), 33.

of the *Allegro energico* (mm. 8-11) is transformed by means of liquidation in mm. 25-29. Perhaps the most striking metamorphosis is that of the motive introduced in mm. 14-15. This fiendish, menacingly percussive motive in the bass mutates and blooms into the beautiful *cantando espressivo* melody at m. 153, through transposition from the dark depths of B minor to the warmth and comfort of D major, by elongating the rhythm, and by adding gently rolling arpeggiations to support the melody. As in Crumb's music, Liszt's motivic transformations give the music coherence and cohesiveness—like Crumb's *Eine Kleine Mitternachtmusik*, Liszt's Sonata is bookended by the same motives—as well as direction.

Interestingly, though there is no doubt that Crumb would have been familiar with Liszt's music, especially as a pianist surrounded by Romantic repertoire in his youth, he does not cite Liszt as a major influence, even though for many, his Sonata is the prime example of thematic transformation. Instead, Crumb acknowledges Bartók, whose treatment and transformation of simple motives was examined earlier. Crumb also spent much time with the music of Anton Webern, whose compositions represent the epitome of economy, during his time as a student of Ross Lee Finney.

Crumb's *Five Pieces for Piano* is a perfect model of motivic efficiency and constant metamorphosis. Andrew Porter stated in a 1975 article in *The New Yorker*, "Crumb works by distillation, finding small, precise, quintessential symbols."²² Crumb himself remarked that "an interesting practice in music since the atonal period of the Viennese composers has been the widespread use of a few tiny pitch cells."²³ As pointed out by David Burge, the entire work is built upon a collection of three pitches—B-flat, G-

²² Andrew Porter in Gilbert Chase, "George Crumb: Portraits and Patterns," *George Crumb: Profile of a Composer*, (C.F. Peters Corporation, 1986), 3.

²³ Crumb, 18.

sharp, and A, which can be reordered as G-sharp, A, and B-flat—all stated in a *pizzicato* cluster in the first measure; but as the work unfolds, the collection is constantly reordered and transposed.²⁴ The cluster is immediately transformed in the following measure, transposed as F-sharp, G, and E-sharp, and expanded from a cluster of semitones to a group of a minor ninth and minor seventh. The motive is transformed again in the third measure to C-double-sharp, E, and D-sharp, this time, as quick grace notes leading into the accelerating repetition of D-sharp.

The pitch collection permeates the entire work, also beginning the second movement, this time as D, C-sharp, and E-flat, but this time, the pitches are held silently, and their ghostly resonance is triggered by the striking of surrounding fragments that are also transformations of the motive. The lingering resonance is used throughout the piece, casting a unifying shadow over all of the mutations. Perhaps the most magical use of the motivic pitches occurs at the central climax of the third piece—and the entire work—where the collection forms the *pizzicato* fragment leading to the climactic high E, then rhythmically damped. In the fifth and final piece, the pitch collection is expanded in register, with each constituent part sounding like scattered bells, but as the piece winds down, the intervals retract as the music returns to the opening texture, ending on the exact same pitches as the opening chord.

Debussy, a major influence on Crumb's work, uses the same technique in his String Quartet in G minor. According to Pearsall, "much of the melodic material in this [first] movement—as well as the movements that follow—may be traced to the single three-note shape/interval motive" of the opening, consisting of G, F, and D (<-2, -3>). Pearsall shows that the motive is instantly transformed in the second half of the opening

²⁴ Burge, 214.

measure, transposed and occurring in retrograde. It is then reordered in the next measure.²⁵

In addition to modification of pitch collections, Crumb uses truncation and fragmentation as one of his main tools of transformation. Pearsall differentiates between “truncation, in which an abbreviated segment comes from the beginning of the source melody, and fragmentation, in which shorter segments are drawn from the middle or end of the source melody.” He highlights examples of both techniques in the opening of the second movement of *Madrigals*, Book IV. Here, the full motive occurs after the first fermata, and is immediately truncated—the first bit of the motive occurs. The full motive is repeated, and then followed by the second bit of the motive—this is fragmentation.²⁶

Along the same lines is Crumb’s use of additional pitches. For example, in his *Five Pieces*, the main pitch collection is composed of three semitones. The first six measures are transformations of the given intervallic content. However, in m. 7 of the first piece, there is one added pitch. The pitches in the gesture include A, B-flat, B, C, C-sharp, D, E, F-sharp, G, and G-sharp. This collection can be divided into three groups of semitones, but the odd note is the E, which occurs in the middle of the flourish. Though one might be tempted to casually label the note as random, the lone E holds formal significance. For example, the first piece has three instances of accelerating repeated notes (mm. 4, 9, and 14), each with an increasing number of notes; it is the third iteration that contains the longest series of repeating notes, which happens to be E. The lone E also marks the center of the arch of the work, as it is the climax of the third piece.

²⁵ Pearsall, “Transformational Streams: Unraveling Melodic Processes in Twentieth-Century Motivic Music,” *Journal of Music Theory* Vol. 48 No. 1 (2004), 81-82.

²⁶ Pearsall, “Dialectical Relations Among Pitch Structures,” *George Crumb & The Alchemy of Sound*, Colorado College Music Press (2005), 61.

Another process of transformation that must be taken into consideration—especially in examining *Mitternachtmusik*—is timbral transformation. Though this can be viewed as merely a matter of orchestration, it is relevant in his solo piano works, as we shall see. Throughout *Mitternachtmusik*, Crumb cycles motivic content through different timbres and methods, translating pitch and intervallic values into rhythmic values, displaying yet another way of creating symmetry and asymmetry.

Eine Kleine Mitternachtmusik is particularly interesting in that its key motive is technically not original—the motivic basis of the work comes from Thelonious Monk, not George Crumb. The first piece of the suite, “Nocturnal Theme,” presents Monk’s even, eight-bar “Round Midnight” theme, unaltered. Crumb then extracts the first gesture—the rising arpeggiation composed of a perfect fourth, major second, and perfect fourth (<+5, +2, +5>) followed by a falling major third—and uses it as the fundamental building block and springboard for the entire work. Other important intervals that occur throughout the theme and the work as a whole are minor seconds and tritones, diminutions of the principal motive, making Monk’s theme an amorphous flow of motivic development. Crumb is essentially improvising on Monk’s theme.

Eine Kleine Mitternachtmusik

(A Little Midnight Music)

Ruminations on 'Round Midnight' by Thelonius Monk
for Amplified Piano

George Crumb

1. Nocturnal Theme
Tema - poco adagio, esitante (♩ = ca. 50)

Beneath Monk's theme, Crumb creates a ghostly undercurrent of inner piano sounds that, upon first hearing, sound like simple colorations and effects. However, close examination reveals that they are transformations of the principal motive. In fact, transformation occurs even before the theme is stated, in the opening *glissando* strum. As mentioned, this strum is composed of two superimposed chords: E-flat minor, which is the tonality of Monk's theme, and A minor. The contrast between tonalities foreshadows the dialectical nature of the work, but is at the same time, a transformation of the theme. The outer and central pitches of the superimposed chords form a symmetrical pitch collection (E-flat, A, B-flat, and E, or <+6, +1, +6>). This is distortion of the key motive, <+5, +2, +5>—the outer intervals are expanded, and the center is diminished. The chord is also strummed downward, making it a retrograde of the upward arpeggiation. This subtle mutation establishes important dichotomies of the work—the importance of large versus small intervals, and the constant distortion and metamorphosis of Monk's <+5, +2, +5> motive.

Inversion continues in the second measure, this time with the intervallic values. Crumb punctuates the first two-bar statement with a rhythmic percussive motive, played on the metal crossbeams of the piano. The rhythm is made up of two triplet eighth notes, a quintuplet of sixteenth notes, and another triplet rhythm with a quarter note and eighth note, together creating a 2-5-2 grouping—an inversion of the <+5, +2, +5> intervals of the principal motive. The rhythmic percussive motive is then fragmented at the end of the movement.

Another instance where Crumb extracts Monk's material for his own transformation occurs in m. 6. Crumb underscores the descending line of Monk's theme with descending semitones, this time on the keys, derived from the descending semitones of Monk's theme in m. 4.

Through the course of the first piece, Crumb sets up tension and opposition between Monk's theme and his own motives and transformations. Interpretation of the opening statement poses a "chicken-or-egg" dilemma—is Monk's theme considered first as it is played clearly on the keys and is the namesake of the work, or is Crumb's *glissando* strum the first gesture? Balance is difficult to track as Crumb modifies Monk's motives, but also his own. This ambiguity aids in the propulsion of the music, and adds extra satisfaction and meaning to the moments of clarity and stability. "Nocturnal Theme" is the perfect prologue, foreshadowing the dialogue and struggle that make up the work.

The rhythmic percussive motive (2-5-2) is also a prominent element in Crumb's works. In *Vox Balaenae*, a similar percussive *accelerando* and *ritardando* occurs in the piano in the first variation of *Variations on Sea-Time*. The flutist then echoes this in the

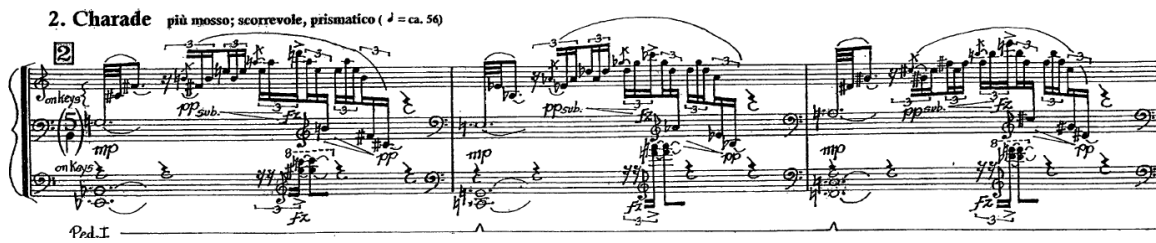
second variation with the “ko-ki-ka-ku-ka-ki-ko” vocalization. The same percussive motive also shows up in *Five Pieces for Piano*.

Part of the magic of *Eine Kleine Mitternachtmusik* lies in how Crumb fuses and reconciles jazz and blues melodies and harmonies with his own tonal language. By diminishing the intervals of Monk’s motive, Crumb creates his own version of the motive that acts as a counterpart to Monk’s. When Crumb’s motive emerges, a link is immediately established to melodic tendencies of his other works. His fantasy-like melodies of seconds and thirds decorated with characteristic grace notes permeate the work and call to mind other compositions. For example, a similar melody occurs throughout his *Makrokosmos* volume I, specifically in the twelfth piece, “Spiral Galaxy,” in which the melody is made up of A, B, D, and E, which forms $\langle +2, +3, +2 \rangle$. Another instance is in the first flute cadenza of *Vox Balaenae*, which contains D, E, F, A-flat, and B-flat, or $\langle +2, +1, +3, +2 \rangle$.

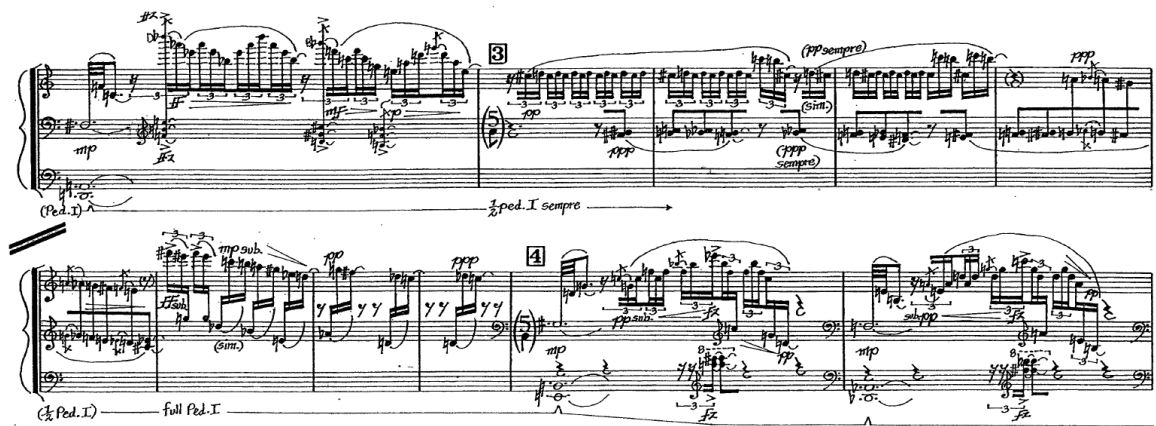
The second piece, “Charade,” begins by changing the tonality of the work from a mostly diatonic E-flat minor tonality, to an E-flat major chord with a tritone and fourth on top that soon gives way to tonal ambiguity. What ensues is an explosive exploitation of fourths and seconds—the two intervals of the principal motive. The entire piece is a deconstruction of Monk’s motive and a balancing act between fourths and seconds.

The piece unfolds with four flurries of ascending and descending arpeggiating fourths (mm. 1-4), each springing out of a major triad. The major triads occur in the following order: E-flat major, C major, F major, and D major. When reordered as C, D, E-flat, and F, the root pitches form a symmetrical group, as well as a diminution of the principal motive: $\langle +2, +1, +2 \rangle$. The apexes of each arpeggiation are also topped with a

major third, again; derived from Monk’s theme. In the fourth measure, Crumb breaks the pattern of the first three measures by shortening the arpeggiations and changing their direction. Each fragmented reiteration includes the tritone and fourth that occurred with the previous major triads.



He then balances the fourths with a steady stream of minor seconds in the upper voice, and major seconds in the lower voice played very softly to contrast the loudness of the first four bars. Within the stream, the seconds themselves are constantly being transformed. In mm. 6-7, the second inverts to include C and B, which are a major and minor seventh about the C-sharp. Then, in mm. 10-12, Crumb transposes and reverses this motive.



mm. 4-14

Much like the first piece, the opening of “Premonition” transforms the principal motive by truncating the intervals, and reflecting the values via the rhythm. The first statement consists of chords moving in contrary motion—descending in the right hand

and ascending in the right hand—in a rhythm made up of two eighth notes, a set of triplets, and another two eighth notes. The 2-3-2 rhythm is a diminution of the 2-5-2 rhythmic percussive motive of the first piece, which itself is a numerical inversion of the principal motive.

This diminution is also reflected in the individual chord; Crumb uses the principal motive (<+5, +2, +5>) and shrinks its outer intervals. Each chord is composed of a major third, major second, and major third (<+4, +2, +4>). He then sets up opposition by stating the original motive, transposed up a fifth from its original starting pitch.

However, this only serves as a momentary reference point and intermediary gesture that leads into a reiteration of the prior transformation; this time, the <+3, +2, +3> group is broken up into separate notes, loosely echoing the principal motive. This side-by-side reference highlights the cross-pollination between Monk's motive and what we can refer to as Crumb's motive. Pearsall refers to this type of progression as a "transformational stream," which he defines as the "step-by-step evolution of a motive toward new motivic constructions that may differ quite radically from the source motive."²⁷

At R. 8, the fragmented fourths of "Charade" return, but this time they resemble Monk's more closely; G-sharp and D-sharp are soon super-imposed on the alternating D and A. Taken together, they form <-5, -1, -5>—the principal motive in retrograde with the central interval diminished.

A culmination occurs at R. 9 in which Crumb combines the chordal fragments. Instead of right hand and left hand playing chords in contrary motion, both upper and lower chords descend. Then, at the tail end of the fragment, Crumb superimposes

²⁷ Pearsall, "Transformational Streams: Unraveling Melodic Processes in Twentieth-Century Motivic Music," *Journal of Music Theory* Vol. 48 No. 1 (2004), 77.

ascending chords in contrary motion. Both fragments intersect at the duple eighth note chords—the last two chords for the first fragment, and the first two for the second fragment. The five chords before and after the intersection form a 5-2-5 grouping together with the central eighth notes. The piece concludes with a modified rendition of Crumb’s motive, which occurs in a 3-2-3 grouping, reversing the grouping of the chords.

As previously discussed, the fourth piece of the set, “Cobweb and Peaseblossom” is a flight of fancy that avoids the clear architecture that was present in the first three pieces. Motives are present, but are never fully developed and grouped into tangible themes. The piece unfolds as a scatterbrained scherzo of key motivic intervals, creating a loose interplay between seconds and larger intervals—thirds, tritones, and fourths.

The opening statement begins with sudden *sforzando* bursts of minor seconds—three descending semitones in the upper voice, and three ascending in the lower voice—the first two, loudly and in quick succession, and the second two, softly and spaced by two sixteenth rests. After a pause, this is answered by a group of quickly arpeggiated thirds to balance the seconds, moving in contrary motion with an extreme *crescendo*. There is a moment of compromise as Crumb combines the two intervals with both upper and lower voices descending with a *diminuendo*. The two intervals continue in dialogue, with the seconds prevailing in mm. 12-17.

4. Cobweb and Peaseblossom (Scherzo)
 Vivace (♩ = ca. 106, ♯ = ca. 212)

10 11 12

Silently depress with fingers, then release Ped. I and secure with Ped. II

Ped. II sempre (senza Ped. I)

Ped. I *

(Ped. II sempre)

To break up the dialogue between the seconds and thirds, Crumb recalls elements of the second piece by re-introducing the fourths in quick, staccato arpeggiations. The arpeggiations occur in descending and ascending fragments, and are punctuated by the loud minor seconds that began the piece. In m. 22, the arpeggiations are accompanied by rolled chords composed of a tritone and fourth, which were key intervals that accompanied each chord and arpeggiation in the second piece.

In mm. 50-53, the fourths are diminished to thirds, leading into a new phrase beginning in m. 54. The thirds continue to pepper the upper voice, but the lower voice contains fragments made up of major sixths and minor thirds. When ordered as C, F-sharp, A, and E-flat, the collection forms $\langle +6, +3, +6 \rangle$, an augmentation of the principal motive.

In the fifth piece, “Incantation,” the “Round Midnight” theme is clearly reiterated through the course of four main phrases, but is constantly at odds with fragments of Crumb’s transformations; each fragment of Monk’s theme is answered by a fragment of Crumb’s usually longer mutation. The first two bars of Monk’s theme start the piece, but are interspersed with minor seconds extracted from the thematic material. The next fragment of Monk’s theme is followed by an augmentation of the rhythmic percussive

motive in the first piece, and a diminution of Monk’s motive— $\langle +5, +2, +5 \rangle$ is reversed and diminished to form $\langle -3, -1, -3 \rangle$. In the third fragment of the phrase (R. 19), Crumb brings back the chords of the third piece in the rapid strikes. Again, these chords form $\langle +4, +2, +4 \rangle$, a diminution of the principal motive. To conclude the first phrase, the rhythmic percussive motive of the first piece returns, this time fragmented, as it is missing the first beat.

The second and third phrases follow the same pattern, but are longer due to the extended length of the transformations, specifically that of the seconds. The second phrase groups them into spiraling triplets, and the third augments them to form ninths and inverts them to form sevenths. The fourth phrase is shorter and contains more of Monk’s essence, but it is Crumb’s metamorphic process that dominates the center of the movement and the work as a whole.

The sixth piece, “Golliwog Revisted,” is another wild romp, this time parodying Debussy’s *Golliwog’s Cakewalk*. Like the fourth piece, it also lacks clear organization, but uses Monk’s motive in quick bursts. Crumb begins this piece by obviously transforming the opening statement of Debussy’s piece; Crumb maintains the defining

Golliwog theme is actually Monk's motive, but heavily altered, occurring as an inverted retrograde. The motive descends, and the intervals have been diminished and swapped— $\langle +5, +2, +5 \rangle$ becomes $\langle -1, -3, -1 \rangle$. The relationship is clearer in the main Golliwog theme in m. 9, when the melody occurs in a single voice; the descent is the same $\langle -1, -3, -1 \rangle$ collection, but then continues to include a rising third, clarifying itself as the inversion of the rising $\langle +5, +2, +5 \rangle$ arpeggiation and falling third of the “Round Midnight” theme. The following measure then continues the transformational exchanges of the seconds and sevenths that occurred in the fifth piece, while imitating the trajectory of Monk's opening motive. Monk's motive is modified yet again two bars later, this time as falling $\langle -4, -2, -4 \rangle$ groups.

As the piece leads into the B section in mm. 19-20, Crumb quotes Debussy again, who is in turn quoting Wagner, with his cheeky “Tristan” quote. Crumb preserves the exact pitches, but the fragment does not fall to the E-flat as it does in Debussy's piece, making Crumb's fragment even more unresolved and Wagnerian. Crumb goes further than Debussy's quotation of Wagner, using another fragment from *Tristan und Isolde* in mm. 23-24. This is a strategic choice, as the source material just happens to contain key intervals from Crumb's piece, as the melody is a series of four rising minor seconds, supported by chords containing tritones. The chords themselves also make a transformation; the first chord forms a tritone and major third (F, B, and D-sharp), which then eases into the second chord, which forms a major third and tritone (E, G-sharp, and D). The tritone of this chord (G-sharp and D) then becomes the base for the next iteration of the fragment in m. 27.

These intervals are then used to create a blues tune beginning in m. 4. The melody opens with a rising fourth as if proceeding into Monk's theme, but then descends again to lead into a rising major seventh and falling minor second (inversion). The falling third of Monk's motive is also worked in towards the end of the bar. Crumb segues into the blues melody in m. 3 with the gentle undercurrent of triplet minor seconds. The triplet rhythm then appears as the blues melody is expanded in m. 6.

The middle section is a dialogue between thirds and fourths; the passage opens with a fragment of descending thirds in the blues rhythm, answered by a rising and falling fragment of fourths. This is coupled with rising fourths in the lower voice and repeated, transposed down a step. The thirds and fourths find compromise as the fragment in m. 9 combines both intervals in the blues rhythm. Surrounding this fragment are more transformations of seconds—in the lower voice, there is a descending minor second leading to a major second cluster, and the fragment is punctuated by a palm-strike on the keys and a bell-like chord in the upper register composed of D, C-sharp, and E-flat (major seventh and major second). At the end of the middle section, it appears as though the thirds prevail, but in m. 13, the triplet blues rhythm transitions into four duple eighth notes—a final counteraction to the triplet thirds. The third section brings back the blues melody of the first section, but this time in conjunction with the motive formulated in m. 9. This motive is then truncated as the piece winds down to its inconclusive ending.

It should be noted that the form of the piece reflects the exchange and opposition between large and small intervals. The movement is prefaced with the statement "At sixes and sevens." As previously discussed, the meters of the bars alternate between 6/8

and 7/8, but the piece is also made up of three sections, the first and last being six bars in length, and the middle being seven bars in length.

The eighth piece, “Cadenza with Tolling Bells,” is the last distortion of Monk’s motive, opening with an aggressive, dissonant rendition—the sixteenth notes of the original motive are now rapid thirty-second notes, and the intervals of the upward arpeggiation are grotesquely augmented from $\langle +5, +2, +5 \rangle$ to $\langle +11, +3, +11 \rangle$. The falling third is also diminished to a minor third. The piece is divisible into four phrases, each prefaced with a permutation of the Monk motive. The second phrase (R. 36) slightly diminishes the first augmentation to form $\langle +10, +3, +10 \rangle$, but the third phrase (R. 37) returns to $\langle +11, +3, +11 \rangle$.

However, in the fourth phrase, which is an extended coda, Crumb further transforms the motive. The phrase opens with a fragment composed of G, D-flat, C, and G-flat— $\langle +6, -1, +6 \rangle$. When reordered as G, C, D-flat, G-flat, this forms $\langle +5, +1, +5 \rangle$, clearly showing its relation to the original motive. Furthermore, it also alludes to the dichotomy of black and white keys established by the opening *glissando* strum of “Nocturnal Theme.” The rapid gesture is supported by a loud chord underneath which is also made up of the same intervals. Crumb retains the falling third of the main motive—which also appears throughout the previous phrases—adding it, along with a loud clock-bell effect, to cap off the transformed fragment. The fragment is repeated three more times, with each reiteration transposed down a minor third. After the fourth occurrence, the cell is fragmented, with only the major third remaining, until it too disappears.

("... the advent of midnight")

9. Midnight Transformation
Tema - a slow ballad tempo, languidly (♩ = ca. 50)

39 (on keys) " " (pp) (pizz. (ft)) (stnt) (Ped. I) depress silently (middle finger covers both 3rd and 4th) [hold until after glissando].

In addition to mutating the main motive, Crumb muses on the rhythmic percussive motive of the first piece. Here, the opening distorted Monk motive is followed by a rhythmic motive made up of chords also reflecting the intervals of the opening arpeggiation. The rhythm itself is a written-out acceleration made up of an eighth note, a triplet, and a quintuplet of sixteenths. Crumb transforms the original rhythmic motive made up of two triplet eighths, a quintuplet of sixteenths, and a triplet of a quarter note and eighth note by moving the last triplet group (quarter note and eighth note) to the front—the quarter note becomes a duple eighth note here.

The motive is further developed in the second phrase. Crumb focuses on the quintuplet sixteenth notes, first speeding them up by altering the rhythm to form sextuplet sixteenths (two triplets). He then bisects the $\langle +10, +3, +10 \rangle$ collection between the upper and lower voice, and phases the fragments so that they appear in staggered entrances—the sevenths in the upper voice enter first, then the sevenths in the lower voice. The point at which they intersect (after the first set of triplet sixteenth notes) creates an augmentation of the intervallic motive: $\langle +10, +6, +10 \rangle$.

The third phrase returns to the duple-triple-quintuple progression of the first phrase, but this time, the quintuplet sixteenth note group is fragmented—the first note of the quintuplet is removed. The truncated quintuplet is then repeated four more times, with each occurrence except the last transposed.

Throughout the piece, particularly in the first and last phrase, the major third from Monk’s motive is ever present. After the accelerating $\langle +10, +3, +10 \rangle$ figure, Crumb employs an accelerating tremolo of thirds in the upper and lower voice. Unlike the previous acceleration, in which both upper and lower voices accelerated in tandem, the thirds accelerate at different rates. Both voices begin together, with a C-sharp and F in the upper voice and a D and F-sharp in the lower voice, but it is the upper voice that then accelerates in a quasi-tremolo gesture with a third composed of G and B, as a quintuplet of sixteenth notes, then a septuplet of sixteenths. Beneath this, the lower voice also follows a quasi-tremolo figuration, with a third composed of A-flat and C, but the rhythm remains as triplet eighths, providing another take on the acceleration of the $\langle +10, +3, +10 \rangle$ figure. In each quasi-tremolo figure, the two thirds form a $\langle +4, +2, +4 \rangle$ collection, diminishing the intervals of the Monk motive.

Following three chords which are an extension of the first chord of thirds, the quasi-tremolo thirds are repeated, this time fragmented, as Crumb foregoes the triplet eighth notes and quintuplet sixteenths, moving directly to the septuplet sixteenths. The

thirds do not reappear until the fourth and final phrase, where they are used to punctuate the $\langle +6, -1, +6 \rangle$ units. As the piece approaches the end, the thirds are transposed downward and eventually transformed into a cluster of three semitones played as a harmonic inside the piano.

The final piece of the suite, “Midnight Transformation” begins by restating the eight-bar “Round Midnight” as in the “Nocturnal Theme.” But whereas the first piece left Monk’s theme inconclusive, ending on a dominant harmony, the last piece goes on to finish it by repeating the eight-bar theme, this time finishing on an E-flat major chord. In addition, instead of being coupled with Crumb’s undercurrent of tonal tampering and coloration, the theme is now rounded with complete harmonies and bass movement, plucked on the strings inside of the piano.

However, although Monk’s theme is no longer symbiotically fused to Crumb’s transmutations, Crumb still maintains a presence and dialogue. The reiteration of the “Round Midnight” theme at m. 9 is eight measures in length, but is interspersed with three measures of Crumb’s fragments making the final phrase a total of ten measures (the last fragment occurs in the same measure as Monk’s cadence). Crumb’s melodic fragments are made up of the same transformations on Monk’s theme that first occurred in the third piece, an arpeggiation composed of intervals $\langle +4, +2, +4 \rangle$, again, a diminution of the principal motive. The arpeggiation rises and falls, and is then fragmented in a similar fashion to the third piece. The fragment is supported by a *pizzicato* augmentation of the major third to a rising tritone and major second, and punctuated by the return of the rhythmic percussive motive of the first piece.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for measures 10-18 of Monk's theme. The score is written on a grand staff with piano and percussion parts. It includes performance instructions such as "Sognando, lontano", "strike metal crossbeam with a percussionist's yarn stick", "gliss. over str.", and "poco ritard.". The score is marked with dynamics like *ppp* and includes a "Fine" marking at the end.

mm. 10-18

Following two measures of Monk’s theme, Crumb’s fragment returns, transposed up a minor third, following the same trajectory as Monk’s theme, and fragmented, as a triplet is removed. The final occurrence of Crumb’s fragment is the longest, more than doubling the length of the previous fragments. The fragmentation scheme follows that of the last phrase of the third piece, but it is interspersed with a *glissando* and the rhythmic percussive motive. Crumb also adds one last triplet.

The conclusion of the work reflects the dialogue of the entire work between Monk’s “Round Midnight” theme and Crumb’s transformations, and the dichotomy between conclusiveness and inconclusiveness that is present in so much of Crumb’s work. Monk’s theme cadences on a resolved E-flat major chord, yet Crumb’s fragment, suspended above the E-flat major chord, remains unresolved, creating an air of ambiguity—even after the piece has ended, listeners are left to mull over this lingering tension.

The ambiguous ending may be slightly frustrating to some, but it also suggests reconciliation between Monk's theme and Crumb's transformations after such a long journey. "Nocturnal Theme" presents the "Round Midnight" theme and hints at the metamorphosis to come. In "Charade," the theme is disassembled into its constituent intervals. "Premonition" reconstructs the key motivic elements of Monk's theme, but Crumb uses the broken pieces to build new motivic fragments using the given materials. It is here that we see a new melody formed out of Monk's melody. After that meditative third piece, "Cobweb and Peaseblossom" dismantles the motivic material more rambunctiously than the second piece. In "Incantation," Crumb fuses key fragments of Monk's melody with his own melody that emerged in the third piece—this is the crux of the work. As mentioned, "Golliwog Revisited" is a slapstick mish-mash of motivic scraps and quotations. "Blues in the Night" returns to a recognizable reiteration of the key motive, but Crumb morphs it into another American musical idiom, namely, blues. The "Cadenza with Tolling Bells" is Crumb's final distortion of Monk's theme, pushing it further into grotesque realms before winding down to the last piece. Finally, in "Midnight Transformation," Monk's theme returns in its entirety, separated yet still surrounded by Crumb's transformations—Monk and Crumb exist in harmony at the end.

Quotation

Musical borrowing is a hallmark of Crumb's works. When it comes to quotation, the most obvious example is his use of Chopin's *Fantaisie-Improptu* in *Dream Images* from *Makrokosmos*, volume I, and Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* in volume II, or his quotation of Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* in *Black Angels*. In addition to these concrete examples, volumes I and II of *Makrokosmos* allude to the preludes of Chopin and Debussy, as both volumes are composed of twelve pieces. The pieces are also labeled as "Fantasy Pieces," which is a nod to Schumann's *Fantasiestücke*, which also happens to be opus 12.

Eine Kleine Mitternachtmusik is another exposition of quotation and allusion. The piece is rife with both musical and literary quotations—even the title itself is an allusion to Mozart's *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*. Throughout the work, Crumb uses quotation and allusion to source transformational material, and to enhance key topics and idioms. Like his use of extended technique, Crumb's musical borrowing is never arbitrary.

The first quotation is obviously Thelonious Monk's "'Round Midnight" theme, which becomes the building block and dramatic impetus for the work. Tracey Schmidt, in her analysis of Crumb's *An Idyll for the Misbegotten* for amplified flute and three percussionists, highlights the same technique; Crumb uses the opening theme of Debussy's *Syrinx* for solo flute, framing within actual quotation marks as he does with Monk's theme in *Mitternachtmusik*, and proceeds to transform the theme throughout the work. According to Schmidt, "besides the explicit quotation of *Syrinx* at the surface of the piece, the borrowings lie also at deeper levels; many aspects of the composition are

influenced by *Syrinx*. These aspects include extra-musical elements, pitch structure, form, functional-tonal implications, timbre, and special effects.”²⁸ Similar to *Mitternachtmusik*, the quotation dictates both the macro and microelements of the work, from its overall form down to each pitch structure and timbral embellishments. As previously discussed, Monk’s theme pervades *Mitternachtmusik* in various permutations, always morphing both overtly and subtly.

Though Monk’s theme permeates every inch of the work, Crumb employs other quotations, using them as filters to both aid and enhance Monk’s theme, or to further mask it. After introducing Monk’s theme in the first piece, the next quotation occurs in the third piece, “Premonition.” Crumb uses motivic elements from Monk’s theme and transforms them into chords that channel Messiaen—Crumb specifically utilizes mode four of Messiaen’s modes of limited transposition.²⁹ The harmonic and textural material alludes to Messiaen and Debussy, but the piece as a whole bears striking resemblance to William Bolcom’s seventh étude of his *12 New Etudes for Piano*, which is also titled “Premonitions.” Bolcom’s étude features the same textures and colors—or rather, Crumb’s “Premonition” features the same textures as Bolcom’s étude, as Bolcom’s was written first (1986). The tremolos that occur at the end of Bolcom’s étude are also akin to the thirty-second note triplets in Crumb’s piece.

²⁸ Tracey Schmidt, “Debussy, Crumb, and Musical Borrowing in *An Idyll for the Misbegotten*,” *George Crumb & The Alchemy of Sound*, Colorado College Music Press (2005), 173.

²⁹ Olivier Messiaen, *The Technique of My Musical Language*, trans. John Satterfield (Alphonse Leduc, 1944), 61.

work; the piece is a dialogue between the two characters, composed of short, non-melodic fragments of the principal motives. Crumb uses a literary allusion to serve a specific function, using Shakespeare's characters in his own plotline.

Debussy is a special composer to Crumb, whose influence can be heard in much of Crumb's music. Furthermore, Crumb constantly alludes to Debussy's music in basic ways such as the specific number of pieces in the first two volumes of *Makrokosmos*, as well as in direct quotation, as in *An Idyll for the Misbegotten*. The sixth piece, "Golliwog Revisited," is a grotesque parody of Debussy's *Golliwogg's Cakewalk*, which is itself a parody of the cakewalk genre. Crumb retains the defining cakewalk rhythms of Debussy's piece, but replaces the pitches with dissonant collections constructed from the motivic elements; Crumb uses Debussy's take on the cakewalk as another platform for his motive transformation. According to Crumb, "perhaps of all the most basic elements of music, rhythm most directly affects our central nervous system."³⁰

Crumb's treatment of Debussy's piece is similar to Ravel's treatment of the waltz idiom in *La Valse*, a piece that also capitalizes upon the grotesqueness of its subject matter. Mikhail Bakhtin defines the grotesque as "the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, [and] abstract; it is the transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity."³¹ According to Jesse Fillerup, "The grotesque gains identity when the viewer interacts emotionally, psychologically, or physiologically with a work...[and] its fundamental characteristic is a unity among disjunction achieved

³⁰ Crumb, 18.

³¹ Mikhail Bakhtin quoted in Everett, "Signification of Parody and the Grotesque in György Ligeti's *Le grand macabre*," *Music Theory Spectrum* 31 no. 1 (2009): 28.

by transgressing boundaries and fusing opposites.”³² Ravel takes the Viennese waltz topic and distorts and exaggerates its fundamental elements past their nineteenth century boundaries of harmony and magnitude. Similarly, in Crumb’s case, the piece is recognizable due to its fundamental rhythm, but there is disjunction through the dissolution of tonality. The grotesque reduction of elements is present throughout the entire work, but is further exaggerated here through the vehicle of Debussy.

“Golliwog Revisited” contains the largest amount of quotation in the work, as Crumb quotes Debussy, who, in his own piece, quotes Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*—a composer quoting a composer quoting a composer. Crumb even goes a step further than Debussy, quoting an additional fragment of *Tristan*, as well as a fragment of Strass’s *Til Eulenspiegel*.

This is without a doubt the most loaded piece of the set. Crumb, who is a white composer, is parodying Debussy, another white composer, who is parodying a cakewalk with its racially charged connotations, and coupling it with Wagner, who was anti-Semitic and xenophobic. The grotesqueness of “Golliwog Revisited” reveals the underlying ugliness and ironic tension of the combination.

The sixth and seventh pieces represent Crumb’s survey of early American music idioms; he states, “As a complement to Monk’s world, I have evoked two immediately recognizable genres of American popular music—‘ragtime’ and ‘blues.’” The seventh piece, “Blues in the Night,” takes its title from Harold Arlen and Johnny Mercer’s famous 1941 song. The piece begins by loosely employing the blues rhythm of the song, with motivic material drawn from Monk’s theme and his own transformations. Crumb states

³² Jessie Fillerup, “Ravel, ‘La Valse,’ and the Purloined Plot,” *College Music Symposium* 49 no. 50 (2009/2010): 348.

in his notes, “[It] is an attempt to fuse that idiom with my own harmonic language.”³³

Then, at the start of the central section (m. 7), Crumb uses the melody of the Arlen and Mercer’s refrain, combining it with the rising fourths of Monk’s “Round Midnight” motive, creating a crossroad between Arlen and Mercer’s blues, Monk’s jazz, and Crumb’s transformation. Perhaps it is Crumb’s interjection into the world of blues and jazz that puts the piece “at sixes and sevens” as the subtitle suggests.



Now the rain's a-fall-in', hear the train a-call-in', whoo-ee, _____ (my ma-ma done tol' me. _)

The image shows a single line of musical notation for a vocal part. It consists of a staff with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The melody is written in a bluesy, jazz-influenced style. Above the staff, three chords are indicated: Bb7, Eb7, and Bb. The lyrics are written below the staff, with a long line of dashes following the word 'who-ee'. A fermata is placed over the end of the line. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' above it.

“Blues in the Night” – refrain

The final allusion occurs in the “Cadenza with Tolling Bells.” The coda of the piece ends with bell-like effects played inside the piano which ring in the coming of midnight, subtly alluding to the end of Schumann’s *Davidsbündlertänze*, which ends with twelve low C’s that also signify midnight.



The image shows two staves of musical notation for a piano accompaniment. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The music is in a bluesy, jazz-influenced style. The bottom staff features a series of low notes, likely representing the tolling bells mentioned in the text. The piece ends with a *ritard.* (ritardando) marking and a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic marking.

³³ Crumb, program notes.

Conclusion

“Although technical discussions are interesting to composers, I suspect that the truly magical and spiritual powers of music arise from deeper levels of our psyche. I am certain that every composer, from his formative years as a child, has acquired a ‘natural acoustic’ which remains in his ear for life... The fact that I was born and grew up in an Appalachian river valley meant that my ear was attuned to a peculiar echoing acoustic; I feel that this acoustic was ‘structured into’ my hearing, so to speak, and thus became the basic acoustic of my music.”³⁴ It is this “natural acoustic” that makes Crumb’s works so engrossing, particularly as other styles and themes are worked through his compositional filter. In *Eine Kleine Mitternachtsmusik*, Monk’s essence is channeled and evoked like a ghost taking on multiple forms through Crumb’s incantation. Monk’s jazz riffs coupled with Crumb’s hypnotic suspension of time and mesmerizing sounds and timbres immediately captivate and entrance us, drawing us into a spiritual conversation between a key figure in American jazz, and one of the most important living American composers.

However, beneath the sonic alchemy of Monk’s jazz and Crumb’s colors is a paradoxically simple yet intricate network of interactions. Using Monk’s “Round Midnight” theme, Crumb extracts a small motivic fragment to build the entire suite through constant metamorphosis. The motive is transformed through the usual methods of transposition, retrogradation, inversion, augmentation, diminution, truncation, and fragmentation—the list goes on. However, the boundaries of these techniques are vastly expanded when paired with Crumb’s vision and treatment of coloristic and timbral possibilities. For example, we see Monk’s theme mutated past mere collections of

³⁴ George Crumb, “Music: Does It Have a Future?” *George Crumb: Profile of a Composer*, (C.F. Peters Corporation, 1986), 19.

reworked pitches, and into *glissando* strums on the strings and percussive rapping on the metal framework of the piano, among other permutations. In the spirit of jazz and inspired by the practices of Debussy and Bartók, Crumb explores the potentials of improvising on a tune.

To forge another link between Monk's theme and Crumb's style, Crumb capitalizes on the symmetrical aspects of Monk's theme to remain true to his roots in traditional form. Crumb frames the dialogue between his transformations and Monk's theme with an overarching dialectic between symmetry and asymmetry, creating motion and direction in the work, and juxtaposing ideas of traditional compositional organization with the freedom of jazz.

Crumb enhances the interplay between European tradition and American jazz with his playful yet intent use of quotation. At times, quotation is mostly comedic, as in "Cobweb and Peaseblossom." In other instances, there is a darker connotation. For example, on its surface, "Golliwog Revisited" is a lighthearted parody of Debussy, Wagner, and the cakewalk. Yet beneath its comic sheen is a grotesque observation of racial irony.

It is these dualities of simplicity and complexity, equilibrium and disequilibrium, and comedy and seriousness that make *Eine Kleine Mitternachtmusik* such an absorbing work; we are engaged in its conversations across time, space, and genre, and in the end, the conversation continues, as the music never quite settles. The inconclusive ending impels listeners to remain engaged in its dialogue of themes and ideas, ruminations that continue to haunt.

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