

Genealogical Aspects of Creative Process in George Crumb

One of the factors that characterises contemporary musicology and theory of music is fetishism in treating the composer's technique with all its derivatives. From the other side, searching of the area of creative process is relatively rarely successful. Precisely made comparing analyses of drafts and sketches and the final version of the work disallow us for transpiring the mystery of creation. Composers themselves stay enigmatic, if ever make declarations on their creative process, usually limiting confine themselves to technical description. Witold Lutosławski, for instance, was quite sure that "it is necessary to think, talk and write about music" (Lutosławski 1999, 118). But he didn't believe that somebody will ever succeed in deciphering the most inner sense of music. An interesting exception can be found in articles by a Polish composer and music philosopher, living in Slovakia, Roman Berger. In his opinion, traditional model of the composer's situation has the following stages:

1. The composer chooses n of elements from the material assemblage with respect for the general system and following his own irrational ideas.
2. The composer chooses the next element (elements).
3. Confrontation of all choices with special respect for the formal models.
4. Appreciation of a result received so far.
5. Correction of a result received so far.
6. Choosing the next element or reproduction of previous elements.
7. Confrontation of all choices ... and following the scheme as above again (Berger 1984, 162–163).

Also Leonard B. Meyer emphasized a freedom of choice as a fundamental factor in the creative process: "Creation is possible because within the limits of his artistic inheritance – his tradition – the artist is free to choose among the implications he can discover" (Meyer 1994, 59, first edition: 1967). But the situation of a contemporary composer seems to be more complicated because all systems, schemes and models, being absolute in the past music, have been destructed. The "conscience of system" disappeared. The music has been reduced to the sum of sound material, to the collection of acoustic phenomena with unlimited possibilities. It is important to notice that Berger's diagnosis of contemporary music as an "ocean of entropy" was formulated in the middle of the 1980s, and even at that time, the early post-avant-garde period, there were some composers who presented a high level of integrity of composer's technique, composer's *métier* and aesthetics. As George Crumb, for example.

Among different definitions of creative process in music, the one formulated by Berger indicates just the attribute of integrity. He describes a creative process as an "action put on the course of the integral, complete entity, of the spontaneous integrity of new systemic qualities" (Berger 2000). Like in the organic processes, the final results are morphologically and structurally consistent. Creative process is comprehended by Berger as getting over linear rationalism, linear logics and linear causality. It leads to spontaneous morphogenesis of new artistic qualities and "has a structure of a dialogue with the musical substance, which is formed ontologically and historically" (Berger 2000, 709). The principle of "ontological plenitude" appears also in the Mięczyński's method of integral interpretation of the music work, as a claim of perceiving a piece of art in all its natural phases of creation and in all signs of its existence in the area of culture, starting from the first conception – up to the phase of reception (M. Tomaszewski 2000, 56). Both authors, Berger and Tomaszewski, were inspired here by the works of Roman Ingarden, especially his *Utwór muzyczny i sprawa jego tożsamości*, Kraków 1957 (The musical work and the matter of its identity). Berger adds also, that a creative process one can consider as a "surmounting a gravity of material substance, of determinism of nature, including mental stereotypes" (Berger 2000, 704).

Many authors have emphasized recently a necessity of revision of previous points of view concerning the music analysis. Some aspects of the music work, being neglected as "non scientific"

by positivistic currents in contemporary musicology ("scientific orthodox" trends – T. W. Adorno), now return in different articles and books (J. Kerman, E. Tarasti, J. J. Eigeldinger, M. Tomaszewski etc.) as necessity of research for profound senses of music work and its values. Apart from examination of the problem of style, an expressive factor, an ethos of the work, the important role has also genealogical aspect. Genealogy, currently apprehended as a record of the descent from an ancestor, in the case of a music work contains the following elements:

1. The heritage of the composer, including tradition (especially national), historic experiences, canons, patterns;

2. The sources of the composer's style, including inspirations and "provocations" from the music and aesthetics of other composers (G. Crumb himself calls it a "stylistic affinity", Crumb/Shuffett 1986, 34);

3. Composer's "self-conscience" verbally expressed (especially about his own music);

4. Individual experience and impressions of the composer;

5. Composer's artistic preferences (art, poetry, literature, theatre etc.);

6. "Reacting, interacting, following, paraphrases, parodies, neglecting" (Tomaszewski 2000, 61).

All these elements, in different ways and with different intensity, could influence a composer's creative process. Let's examine the case of George Crumb.

George Crumb belongs to the group of the 20th century composers of very specific, recognizable style, although sometimes his music is indicated as an example of the eclectic art. This polarity is connected partly with geographical and cultural conditions and different paradigms inside the Western culture. American critics usually focus on the Crumb's independence of American academic tradition (E. Borroff), on his remaining distance to experimentalism and intellectual trends of modern art. For an European audience the most important fact seems to be an unusual synthesis of sonoristic visions with symbolism, archetypes and creative dialogue with medieval and Baroque music. This aspect proves him to be a representative of postmodern art. That's why Crumb's idiomatic style is better perceived in context of contemporary American music, – especially in compare to other composers of his generation (Elliott Carter, Milton Babbitt, Lucas Foss) and *minimal art*, – than in general context of Western music of the second half of the 20th century.

The list of George Crumb's works is not very extended in quantitative and formal senses: there are about 40 titles of compositions (including 3 orchestral pieces and 3 developed long cycles). It is difficult to classify all of them. There are no certain types of music, as for instance stage music or choir music, on the list. The composer has very clear preferences such as chamber music for different instrumental groups, also with a voice (58% of all works) and piano music (30%). Except the early period of "composer's apprenticeship" under the patronage of Ross Lee Finney, one of the American serialists, there are no great transformations of style in Crumb's output. At the beginning of his activity Crumb tried to combine *pointilism* and *Klangfarbenmelodie* with rhythm and pitch structuralism. Starting from *Five Pieces for Piano*, written in 1962, one can say about original own style of Crumb. Its recognizable characteristics are: economy of composer's means, transparent texture and special sound effects emitted off the inside of piano. Next year brings the first of his several works inspired by Federico Garcia Lorca, *Night Music I*. The poetry of Lorca is another constant element in Crumb's style. Progressively, the sonoristic aspect of music attainable to his unusual sense of timbre color and almost unlimited innovative composer's means with exploiting of new modes of playing instruments – conventional or non-conventional, of new vocal techniques and other sound sources, including amplification, became more and more important.

Looking back to the typology presented above let's notice the "key" aspects of artistic genealogy of George Crumb.

1. The influence of historic tradition:

- a) Middle-Ages – Crumb is fascinated with numerology and astrology (*Makrokosmos*, *Black Angels*);

- b) Baroque – the way of using by the composer instruments and the method of building a music form that reminds Baroque idea of a concerto, as well as a texture and figurative element (e. g. *Pastoral Drone*);

- c) Romanticism – the idea of programme music (e. g. *A Haunted Landscape*, *Black Angels* etc.).

2. The composer himself mentioned Charles Ives, Olivier Messiaen, Luciano Berio, Bela Bartók, Claude Debussy and Anton Webern as composers with whom he felt "a certain stylistic affinity".

3. Crumb's pronouncements on the main aspects of composer's *métier* concern the following problems:

a) **General sense of music:**

- *Music might be defined as a system of proportions in the service of a spiritual impulse* (Crumb 1986, 3);

- *I have always considered music to be a very strange substance, a substance endowed with magical properties* (Mac Lean 1986, 20);

- *Music presents us with a dichotomy of thought and intuition* (Crumb/Shuffett 1986, 35);

b) **Ontological aspect of music:**

- *I am often haunted by the thought that all of the many musics of the world are coming together to form **one** music* (Crumb 1986, 5);

c) **The future of music:**

- *There is, to be sure, a sense of adventure and challenge in articulating our conceptions, despite the fact that we can take so little for granted (...) I sense that it will be the task of future to somehow synthesize the sheer diversity of our present resources into a more organic and well-ordered procedure* (Crumb 1986, 17);

d) **Feeling of the presence of the past:**

- *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. (...) Perhaps we have come to think 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* (Crumb 1986, 16);

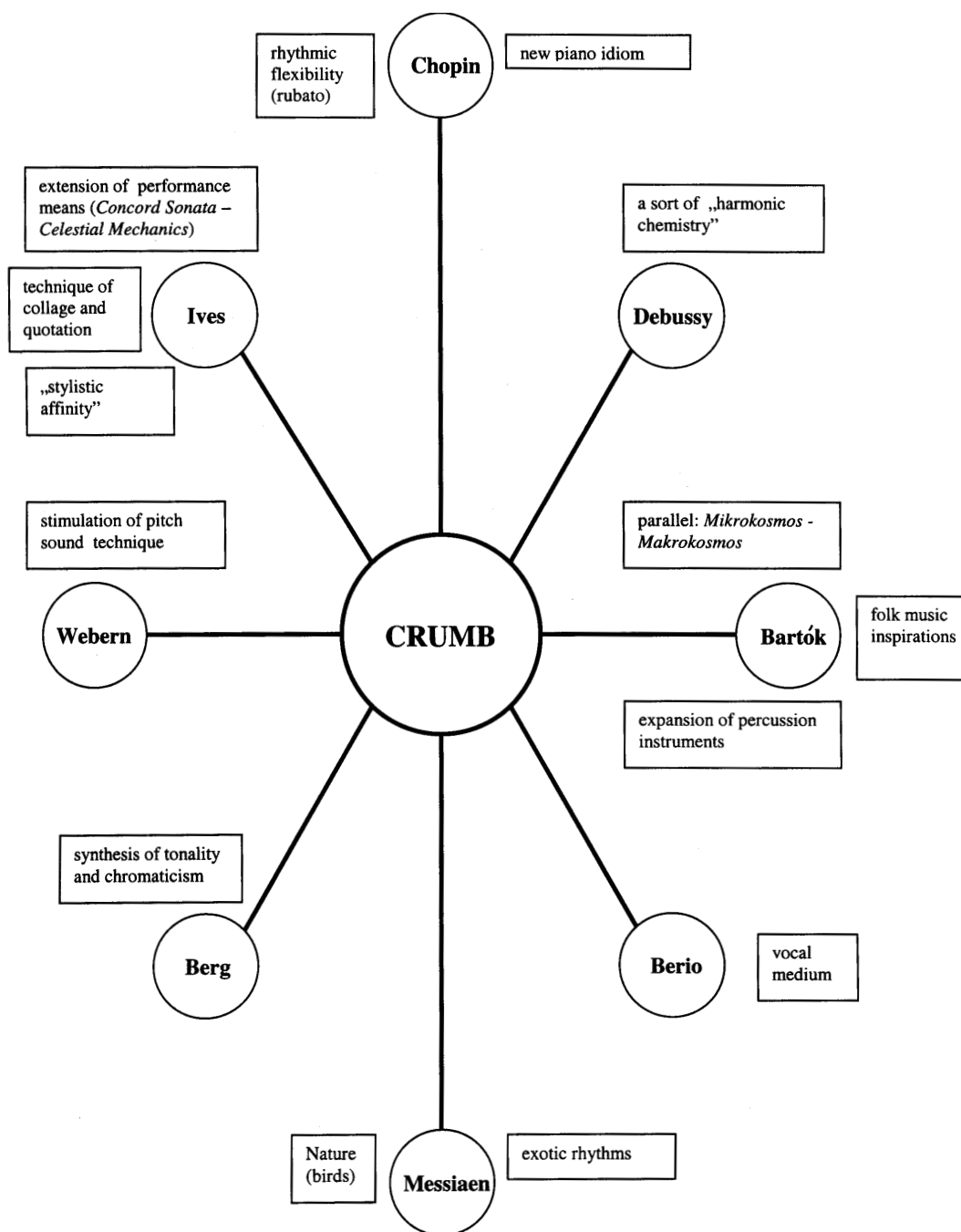
e) **Individual experience:**

- *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. (...) In a broader sense, the rhythms of nature, large and small – the sounds of wind and water, the sounds of birds and insects – must inevitably find their analogues in music* (Crumb 1986, 19).

4. In his reminiscence about the childhood spent in the Appalachian mountains (see: 3.e) Crumb emphasized the important role of the personal, individual experience of Nature, with its acoustic richness. The way of his intensively experienced contact with Nature must be considered as the main source of his idiomatic sound language. Besides, in the post-avant-garde time of enormous accruelement of new elements of vocabulary in the areas of pitch organization, rhythm, timbre etc., integrality of Crumb's music results from his belief in the ancient idea of music being a reflection of nature.

5. Federico Garcia Lorca seems to be Crumb's favorite poet. In 1963–1970 the composer wrote six pieces with the poetry of the Spanish author. Both of them have in common such themes as Nature, death, time (e.g. *Eleven Echoes of Autumn*), and both are fascinated with mystery, hidden senses and symbols (as the moon, water, earth, dream, darkness etc.). Both artists use in their works, with different languages of course, intensive dark pictures and subtilized sonority. Very similar themes and aura are symptomatic also of Walt Whitman's poem *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*, the only Whitman's poem musicalized by Crumb in his *Apparition* (Szoka, 2001).

6. Undoubtedly, the trait which connects Crumb with American poetry in general, is contemplation of the Nature. The idea of sacralisation of the Nature's beauty, was proclaimed by transcendentalists (Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson), and distinctly expressed by Whitman – among others. Hence it appears in many of Crumb's works a feeling of unity with the Universe (*Night of Four Moons*, for instance).



For me, composition is a very slow and laborious process involving the testing of, and choosing from among, various possibilities (Crumb/Shuffett 1986, 35). In these words we can find one of rare remarks made by Crumb on his creative process. More precise description of the Crumb's manner of work was presented in the biographical article by David Cope: "Crumb continues to work very slowly, often completing but one work a year. He believes in strong initial conceptions which propel him into an obsession to develop and complete a new work. David Burge described these early stages of composition: ...when starting a new piece gives the outward impression of having all the time in the world... He wanders distractedly to his study and tries a single sound on the incredibly decrepit hulk of piano that inhabits the room – an untunable, unplayable piano. He tries the sound, varies it, a dozen times, a hundred times. Then to the desk to write himself a note... And leave it in the chaos of letters and manuscript!" (Cope 1986, 15). In the opinion of Suzanne Mac Lean, "...the compositional process is for George Crumb not only an involvement in the symbols and sounds of music but a spiritual quest as well" (Mac Lean 1986, 25).

Christopher Wilkinson indicates, however, that in the compositional process of Crumb an important role plays his sense of music form, his "slow and laborious struggle to achieve *significant form*. Even though his music projects an aura of spontaneity (and can even sound improvisatory), a close analysis shows a logical and organic structure based on *classical principles*" (Wilkinson 1986, 61). For the author of this article, the most essential Crumb's feature seems to be an integrality of all spheres of – returning to Berger's terminology – "musicogenesis", that means a consistence of a composer's conscience of system and positive dialogue with the music history, the sphere of individual experiences with a feeling of universal spirit of culture. His music sometimes reminds us gentle murmurs with subtilized dynamic and timbre colour scales; sometimes it is music of gently waving tensions, sometimes overwhelming with fear, sometimes close to the trance atmosphere. It seems to be organically sunk into the reality of outside world and into inner, intimate spheres; it is the music of mystery landscapes, distant (even cosmic) spaces, dark oceans and bizarre dreams; no matter how complicated structurally its creative process was.

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Santrauka

Georgo Crumbo kūrybinio proceso genealoginiai aspektai

G. Crumbas priklauso grupei XX a. kompozitorių, kuriems būdingas specifinis, lengvai atpažįstamas stilius. Jo savitos muzikinės kalbos šaltiniai gana įvairūs: tai ir nepaprastas garso spalvos pajautimas, neišsenkančios novatoriškos kompozicinės priemonės, ir dvasinio, o kartais intelektualinio pobūdžio idėjos ir sumanymai. Postavangardo laikais, kai muzikinėje leksikoje nuolat daugėja terminų, nusakančių garso aukštį, ritmą, tembrą ir t. t., Crumbo muzika tampa nepakeičiama, ir tai yra jo tikėjimo senąja tiesa, kad muzika yra gamtos atspindys, išdava.

Pasitelkdama R. Bergerio muzikos „morfogenezės“ koncepciją, autorė tyrinėja Crumbo kūrybinio proceso genealoginius aspektus. Kūrybinis procesas čia suprantamas kaip linearinio racionalizmo, linearinės logikos ir linearinio priešastingumo įveikimas, vedantis į spontanišką naujų meninių bruožų morfogenezę ir pasižymintis dialogo su ontologiškai ir istoriškai formuojama muzikine substancine struktūra. Pranešime nagrinėjama ikikūrybinė fazė, muzika *in potentia*, pirminės ir dar galutinai nesusiformavusios kompozitoriaus idėjos bei vaizdiniai, įkvėpimo šaltiniai, jų tarpusavio sąveika ir visos „jo atrandamos prasmės“ (L. B. Meyeris).