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San Francisco State University: Crumb Concerts

Some of the highest-quality musical events in the San Francisco Bay area, particularly chamber music events, take place more or less off the beaten track. Two of the most fascinating evenings occurring since I settled here in 1982—concert programs devoted primarily to four big works by George Crumb—recently took place at San Francisco State University's little Knuth Hall, customarily the venue of student or faculty recitals. Perhaps for that reason, this area's daily newspa-

pers completely—and unjustly—ignored both concerts.

Victoria Neve, the able faculty pianist who organized this two-day Crumb seminar, had the gumption to bring Crumb and his wife here from Philadelphia, where he has taught composition at the University of Pennsylvania since 1965. Neve also opened the first concert with a deft, proficient performance of the early and unfamiliar *Five Pieces for Piano*. Crumb wrote them in 1962, at the age of 33, for David Burge, the remarkable modern-music champion, who at that time adorned the faculty of the University of Colorado but meanwhile has moved on to Eastman.

The first of the two concerts also included *Vox balaenae*, in a sensitive performance with Robin McKee on flute, Doris Stevenson at the piano, and Anne Pinsker doubling on cello and antique cymbals. The evening attained a powerful climax with *Ancient Voices of Children*, that truly extraordinary work dating from 1970. Anne Carol Dudley stood out in the soprano part, ably seconded by the boy soprano Caen Tho-

mason-Redus. Herbert Bielawa, on the podium, led his seven instrumentalists (who dealt with such exotic but expressive paraphernalia as harmonica, saw, and a DX7 made to sound like a child's toy piano) through a moving performance.

The second evening presented a recital by the young American pianist Barry Hannigan, and I must confess that he absolutely bowled me over. He devoted the first half of the program to Volume 1 of Crumb's massive *Makrokosmos* (1972), which he played from memory—an astounding feat in itself. Then he went on to top even that with Frederic Rzewski's satanically difficult, 53-minute blockbuster set of 36 variations on the pre-Pinochet Chilean song "*¡El Pueblo unido será jamás vencido!*" ("The People United Will Never Be Defeated!"). Hannigan, a pupil of David Burge, teaches at Bucknell University in Pennsylvania. With his extraordinary proficiency in avant-garde music, he deserves the widest possible audience. He had his audience here on its feet, cheering.

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