2007

An original composition, Vestiges of Kubla and an analysis of George Crumb's Quest for guitar, soprano saxophone, harp, contrabass, and percussion

John Manuel Crabtree
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, jcrab3t@sbcglobal.net

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations
Part of the Music Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/3336

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
AN ORIGINAL COMPOSITION, VESTIGES OF KUBLA AND AN ANALYSIS OF GEORGE CRUMB’S QUEST FOR GUITAR, SOPRANO SAXOPHONE, HARP, CONTRABASS, AND PERCUSSION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College
In partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

in

The School of Music

by
John M. Crabtree
B.M., Southeastern Louisiana University, 1996
M.M., Louisiana State University, 1999
December 2007
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to first acknowledge the love and unwavering support and of my wife, Sabrina Hurst, and my best friend, Joseph McNair, who have both encouraged me and witnessed my hard efforts throughout my entire academic career. I would like to thank my major professor Dr. Stephen David Beck for his insightful guidance and generous patience with me throughout the years – I hope to work with him again one day. This final process would not have been possible without the personal sacrifice and encouragement of Dr. Jeffrey Perry, my minor area professor, who has provided me with the motivation and wisdom needed to fulfill my goal. Also, the remaining members of my committee, Dr. Dinos Constantinides and Dr. Robert Peck, deserve great recognition as they have provided me with a strong education that has made me a better teacher and musician, and further appreciation is given to Dr. Robert Carney for being a supportive committee member during the final process. Finally, I would like to also thank my colleagues and friends, William Price, and Aaron Johnson for making my graduate career at LSU an enjoyable and memorable experience, and give special thanks to Carlo Vincetti Frizzo, to whom I owe an eternity of debt, for inspiring me to become a better composer and musician.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................. ii

PROGRAM NOTES ................................................................................ iv

ABSTRACT ......................................................................................... v

PART ONE: AN ORIGINAL COMPOSITION, *VESTIGES OF KUBLA* .................. 1

   I. IN XANADU ................................................................. 2

   II. HYMN FOR THE CHILDLESS CITY ................................. 72

   III. BLISS APPARATUS ...................................................... 105

PART TWO: AN ANALYSIS OF GEORGE CRUMB’S *QUEST* FOR GUITAR,
SOPRANO SAXOPHONE, HARP, CONTRABASS, AND PERCUSSION............... 163

   I. INTRODUCTION............................................................... 163

   II. FORM ................................................................. 169

   III. PITCH MATERIAL AND PROCESS ............................. 181

   IV. USE OF MUSICAL QUOTATION: “AMAZING GRACE” .... 204

   V. CONCLUSION.............................................................. 224

REFERENCES .............................................................................. 225

APPENDIX: LETTER OF PERMISSION ........................................ 227

VITA .............................................................................................. 228
PROGRAM NOTES

*Vestiges of Kubla* is scored for the following instrumentation:

- Piccolo
- 2 Flutes
- 2 Oboes
- 2 Clarinets in Bb
- 2 Bassoons
- 4 Horns in F
- 2 Trumpets in Bb
- 2 Trombones
- Tuba

**Timpani**

3 Percussion (sharing the following instruments):
- Bass Drum
- Bongos
- Brake Drum
- Cymbal
- Marimbas (2)
- Tambourine
- Tam tam
- Triangle
- Tubular Bells
- Vibraphone
- Vibraphone
- Vibraslap
- Xylophone

**Guitar - soloist**

- Violin I
- Violin II
- Viola
- Cello
- Contrabass

The score is in C. All instruments in the score with the exception of octave transposing instruments appear at concert pitch.

Accidentals are valid for the entire measure, in the indicated octave only. Courtesy accidentals have been added for notation clarity.

Any amplification of the guitar should be subtle and not affect the natural timbre of the instrument. A pickup microphone in the soundhole of the guitar or a transducer microphone should not be used in any situation. Instead, a simple condenser microphone placed in front of the performer, and a small amplifier with a clean channel input is preferred by the composer.
ABSTRACT

*Vestiges of Kubla* is scored for the following instrumentation: piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, tuba, timpani, 3 percussionist, guitar, and strings. Structured differently than a traditional concerto form, the overall architecture of the work is a large-scale sonata-allegro form in which the first movement is an exposition, the second movement is a slow development, and the third movement is a recapitulation of musical ideas from in the first, followed by a concluding coda. Although the concerto is unified by thematic, motivic, and harmonic content presented in the first movement – derived from an extended guitar chord with Lydian tendencies (E-B-E-A#-B-E, reduced to E-B-A#) – additional but related musical ideas are incorporated in the second and third movements.

The second part of the dissertation is an analysis of George Crumb’s *Quest* (1994) for guitar, soprano saxophone, harp, contrabass, and percussion. This analysis explores and ultimately reveals how the guitar’s standard string tuning (E-A-D-G-B-E), along with the intervallic qualities from a musical quotation (the popular hymn tune *Amazing Grace*), influences and generates Crumb’s entire compositional process in this work. The analysis also briefly explores additional elements, form and symbolism, that define Crumb’s musical style.
PART ONE: AN ORIGINAL COMPOSITION, *VESTIGES OF KUBLA*
Picc. Fl. 1 2
Ob. 1 2
Cl. 1 2
Bsn. 1 2
Hrn. 1 2
Hrn. 3 4
Tpt. 1 2
Trb. 1 2
Tba
Timp.
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Gtr.
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
Cb.

∑
œ
#>
œ
‰
œ
#>
œ
‰
œ
#>
œ
‰
œ
#>
œ
‰
œ
#>
œ
‰
œ
#>
œ
‰
œ
#>
Powerful and Intense
Fierce and Accented (Like the Beginning)
II. HYMN FOR THE CHILDLESS CITY

Reverently $\frac{1}{4} = 63$

Piccolo

Flute 1

Oboe 1

Clarinet in Bb 1

Bassoon 1

Horn in F 1

Horn in F 2

Tubular bells

Guitar

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass

72
More Forward

Picc.
Fl. 1
Ob. 1
Cl. 1
Bsn. 1
Hrn. 1
Hrn. 2
Tub. bells
Gtr.
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
Cb.
Picc.

Fl. 1

Ob. 1

Cl. 1

Bsn. 1

Hrn. 1

Hrn. 2

Tub. bells

Gtr.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vlc.

Cb.

rit.
Cadenza (A Tempo)

Quick and Steady (♩ = 125)

Strong with Reverence (Tempo I ♩ = 63)

Faster (♩ = 90)
With Emphasis

Gtr.

Gtr.

Gtr.

Gtr.

Gtr.

Gtr.

Strongly (q » ¡ ™ º)

molto rit.

A Tempo

Gtr.

A Tempo

stringendo ——- 7 disq.

Gtr.

møf 
cresc.

Gtr.

( ø = 160)

Gtr.

(clean)

Gtr.

93
Strong with Reverence (Tempo I \( \text{q} \approx \text{e} \))
poco rit. to end

Picc.
Fl. 1
Ob. 1
Cl. 1
Bsn. 1
Hrn. 1
Hrn. 2
Tub. bells
Gtr.
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
Cb.
III. BLISS APPARATUS

Quick and Obsessive (\( \text{qk} \Rightarrow \text{sempre} \))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Melody</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Piccolo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flute 1 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oboe 1 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarinet in Bb 1 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bassoon 1 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horn in F 1 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horn in F 3 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trumpet in C 1 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trombone 1 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuba</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timpani</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percussion 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percussion 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percussion 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guitar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violin 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violin 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viola</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violoncello</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrabass</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Intensely
Violently
PART TWO: AN ANALYSIS OF GEORGE CRUMB’S *QUEST* FOR GUITAR,
SOPRANO SAXOPHONE, HARP, CONTRABASS, AND PERCUSSION

I. INTRODUCTION

Unveiled as a work-in-progress in Amsterdam in 1989, George Crumb’s *Quest* for guitar, soprano saxophone, harp, contrabass, and percussion, was not fully complete until 1994. Following this unofficial premiere, and another by the ensemble *Speculum Musicae*, with guitarist David Starobin, at the Settlement School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1990, Crumb was never fully satisfied with the work. For almost another four years he subjected it to revisions that would keep it “unfinished.” Officially completed by the composer in 1994, and published by C.F. Peters in 1996, *Quest* has found intimate success among connoisseurs of Crumb’s music. James M. Keller calls *Quest* a “monumental achievement” that is “among my very favorites in Crumb’s catalogue.” He further predicts it will “become a classic of the chamber repertoire despite its abtrusiveness.” In fact, the 1998 recording of *Quest* (Bridge 9069) was awarded Editor’s Prize for Best Recording of a Living Composer at the MIDEM Classical Music Awards. It further went on to place as one of Tower Records’ Top Five CDs of the Year in 1999. Commissioned by Rose Augustine and the Augustine Foundation, the 25-minute work for guitar and chamber ensemble was composed at the request of guitarist and founder of *Bridge Records*, David Starobin, who had been involved in performances and

---

2 Ibid.
4 By “abtrusiveness” Keller may mean “abstrusiveness.”
recordings of Crumb’s music since 1970.¹ Like most of Crumb’s musical output, Quest is a chamber ensemble work, but with specific focus on the guitar as a concertante instrument.² Originally conceived as a solo guitar piece by the composer Crumb’s admitted insecurity in the command of the instrument, and love of timbrally mixed ensembles and unorthodox instrumental techniques, led him to develop Quest into a chamber work involving a sextet of players: guitar, soprano saxophone, harp, contrabass, and two percussion players.³ Also like many of Crumb’s works, he calls upon “unusual instruments,” such as the Appalachian hammered dulcimer, the African talking drum, and the Mexican rain stick, to provide “an exceptionally colorful palette of timbral and sonoric possibilities”⁴ In fact, he had never used the latter instrument, the Mexican Rain Stick, in any of his works.⁵

Quest (composed in 1994) occupies a very interesting position in Crumb’s catalogue. It is the only large work among the three compositions he composed during a ten-year lull in his creative output (1988-1998). The other two works composed during this time were Easter Dawning (1991) for carillon and Mundus Canis (A Dog’s World) (1998) for guitar and percussion. Until this period, Crumb had averaged to complete one work each year since 1962.⁶ This slackening of his compositional pace was due to his decision, particularly after 1990, to accept more invitations to attend festivals and concerts featuring his music in the U.S. and

---

¹ Ibid.
³ David Cohen, George Crumb, 21.
⁴ Crumb, Quest, 2.
overseas, necessitating extensive travel.\textsuperscript{12} Interlaced with his teaching at the University of Pennsylvania, such touring kept him away from normal compositional activity for several years – which may have ultimately influenced his retirement from the University of Pennsylvania in the spring of 1997 (after 32 years as Professor of Composition). Following this, and starting around 1998, he seemed to recapture his creative energies as his compositional output once again became steady and consistent.\textsuperscript{13}

Much discussion and research has been focused on Crumb’s musical style and technique – with analysis of individual works (as in this study) as well as on his compositional style as a whole – and without a doubt, his music has great appeal to academic research as his style incorporates an eclectic mix of musical materials which eventually, but furtively, become unified within the composition. While Crumb speaks often about his music, at lectures and post-concert discussions with audiences, one will usually find that specific analytical details and methods about his compositional techniques are rarely revealed. His sincere and humble presence, as well as the appreciation he has for his audiences, allow him to be a very accessible composer to those who inquire about his music. During a discussion in 1992 about \textit{Black Angels} (1970) for electric string quartet – probably the most meticulously detailed work of his entire career - Crumb described his style in the following way,

> My music is very much involved with symmetrical structures, and combines tonality, modality, atonality, whole-tone effects, etc. Some of it is quite dissonant, but it’s very tonal.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12} Cohen, \textit{George Crumb}, 22.
\textsuperscript{13} Keller, “George Crumb: An Appreciation,” 5.
\textsuperscript{14} Thomas Lawrence Riis, “A Conversation with George Crumb,” \textit{The American Research Center Journal} 3 (1992): 49
In 1999 he further stated, “…my music is not involved with rational schemes like…rotational techniques, serial music, or anything like that,” a comment that he reiterates often to his audiences.\textsuperscript{15} When asked about his composition procedures, Crumb repeatedly uses the indefinite term “intuitive” to describe his works.\textsuperscript{16} He further makes this claim increasingly vague when he said, “By-and-large, I kind of work by ear the old fashioned way… there is some conscious process that comes… into it.”\textsuperscript{17} His music does have a very intuitive and improvisational quality to it, but one cannot help to wonder about the process and details that generate his pieces. In \textit{Quest}, we will see that his music is ultimately “very tonal,” as his primary motive, as well as the incorporated musical quotation, contains intervals that outline a basic triad.

Consistently throughout the many interviews and discussions he has engaged in about his music, Crumb does present general information about his music while tending to avoid specific details – even among the presence of the most astute musical audiences. Ambiguous comments about his music effortlessly initiate a world of speculation, not to mention further research, in attempting to fully understand Crumb’s musical style and process. In “The Music of George Crumb: Stylistic Metamorphosis as Reflected in the Lorca Cycle,” a dissertation by Christopher Rouse in 1977 from Cornell University, Rouse analyzes Crumb’s style in its several aspects: pitch material and scale use, rhythmic devices, structure and form, theatrical elements, instrument timbre and experimentation, and the use of quotation. The present study will mention many of these topics according to their relevance in \textit{Quest}, while going on the scope of this

\textsuperscript{15} Crumb, 1999.
\textsuperscript{16} Christopher Rouse, “The Music of George Crumb: Stylistic Metamorphosis as Reflected in the Lorca Cycle” (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1977), 111.
\textsuperscript{17} Crumb, 1999.
limited analysis. In particular Crumb’s use of quotation in *Quest* will play a large role in this analysis as it is a central feature of the work, casting its influence over the entire composition. Quotation has permeated Crumb’s music since its first appearance in his orchestral work, *Echoes of Time and the River* (in the “Remembrance of Time” movement with the hymn “Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?”) of 1967.\(^{18}\) Like Charles Ives, a composer that Crumb admits is an influence his music, Crumb’s use of quotation is often a unique characteristic of his style.\(^ {19}\) Since that first modest use of quotation in *Echoes of Time and The River*, Crumb has gone on to borrow musical ideas from composers such as Debussy (“Golliwog’s Cakewalk” in *Eine Kleine Mitternachtsmusik*, and the *Syrinx* theme in *Idyll for the Misbegotten*), Chopin (from “Fantasie-Impromptu” in *Makrokosmos, Volume I*), Strauss (“Also sprach Zarathustra” in *Vox Balanae*), and Schubert (“Death and the Maiden” in *Black Angels*). He even makes allusions to Mahler and Haydn in 1969’s *Night of the Four Moons*. In *Quest*, he calls upon the revival hymn, *Amazing Grace*, presenting it (like most of his quotations) in a surrealistic manner against a landscape of unusual musical timbres in the percussion. Don Gillespie, a long-time friend and biographer of Crumb, says “One cannot escape the impression that something is amiss in Crumb’s world of quotations.”\(^ {20}\) Furthermore, Crumb admits that he adds “some element of distortion” to his quotes, and when he specifically referred to his use of *Amazing Grace* in *Quest*, he said, “…you don’t expect to hear it on the saxophone against a cloud of Japanese bells.”\(^ {21}\) Obviously, a salient event like the sudden appearance of a well-known tune in such an unexpected setting deserves in depth exploration in this study. Consequently, after exploring

---


\(^ {19}\) Crumb, 1999.


\(^ {21}\) Ibid.
Crumb’s use of form, process, and pitch language in Quest I will conclude this study by comparing the appearance of Amazing Grace in Quest to uses of the tune elsewhere, and explore its function and connection to this work, where it acts as a narrative and structural focal point. Chapter two considers Quest in terms of identifiable formal structures and Crumbian stylistic elements. Chapter three focuses on identification of the work’s essential pitch and motivic materials. Chapter four addresses Crumb’s use of quotation. Throughout the study, these topics will be related to the role of the guitar in Quest, and how the instrument’s idiom, and Crumb’s association to it, influences the shape of the work.

---

II. FORM

Like a majority of his other works and with few exceptions, Crumb’s formal scheme in *Quest* is fairly simple and clearly laid out. In his stylistic research of Crumb’s Lorca cycle works, Christopher Rouse states, “Those who search for any complexity of architecture in Crumb’s music are likely to be disappointed.”23 This seemingly harsh judgment is not meant to discredit Crumb’s use of form, nor imply unworthiness for study or appreciation. Rather, Rouse merely seeks to describe how Crumb limits his structures to simple and basic forms in order to present the listener with a familiar design that will allow his complex musical language to be more clearly communicated. In most of Crumb’s works these simple structures usually involve ternary, arch, and strophic forms. Of these, varied strophic form is the most common in *Quest*.

Crumb’s stylistic use of *senza misura* in which a score does not contain bar lines or measures presents a problem for the analyst since such notation makes it rather difficult to present an accurate labeling of formal diagrams. Rehearsal numbers seem to be helpful in overcoming this, but in Crumb’s case these markers do not always agree with his structural designs – especially in the *Forgotten Dirges* and *Nocturnal* movements of *Quest* where the rehearsal numbers appear slightly after the start of each section. Luckily, the composer’s unique notational use of a square-shaped fermata-like symbol, indicating a durational rest measured in seconds (seen in Example 2.1), in almost every case delineates not only phrase, but larger formal boundaries within each movement.

---

Example 2.1. *Quest*, notational symbols for durational rests measured in seconds (as presented in the score’s “Performance Notes”){24}

Although this notational symbol often clarifies features of the music’s form, using it in formal diagrams does not seem to clarify duration and length of a particular phrase or section. Therefore, this analysis will employ several methods of labeling structure throughout, including measure numbers and rehearsal numbers (when applicable), along with consistent text-based symbols that describe the location and length of the section in question. Each new method of formal analysis will also be fully explained upon its presentation.

*Quest* is set in eight movements that include three short refrains acting, according to the composer, as “kind of introductory movements.”{25} As seen in Example 2.2, Refrain 1 and 2 are set before two larger movements, while Refrain 3 precedes the final movement, *Nocturnal*.

**Quest** (1994) for guitar, harp, contrabass, and percussion (2 players)

- Refrain 1
  - I. Dark Paths
  - II. Fugitive Sounds
- Refrain 2
  - III. Forgotten Dirges
  - IV. Fugitive Sounds
- Refrain 3
  - V. Nocturnal

Example 2.2, *Quest*, Movements and groupings as presented in the score’s “Program Listing.”{26}

---

{24} Crumb, *Quest*, 2.
{25} Crumb, 1999.
{26} Crumb, *Quest*, 2.
Interestingly, and similar to his *Songs, Drones, and Refrains of Death* of 1968, Crumb does not assign the *Refrain* movements an official numbered movement designation like the others. In *Songs*, all four of the *Refrain* movements are instrumental (opposed to the other vocal movements that set Federico Garcia Lorca’s poetry) and present, in various appearances, the rhythmic motif that is heard at the beginning of the work. The movement format in *Songs, Drones, and Refrains of Death* is shown in Example 2.3.

*Songs, Drones, and Refrains of Death* (1968) for baritone, electric guitar, electric double bass, amplified piano/amplified harpsichord, and two percussionists

Refrain One  
I. La Guitarra (*The Guitar*)

Refrain Two  
II. Casida de las Palomas Obscuras (*Casida of the Dark Doves*)

Refrain Three  
III. Cancion de Jinete, 1860 (*Song of the Rider, 1860*)

Refrain Four  
IV. Casida del Herido por el Agua (*Casida of the Boy Wounded by the Water*)

Example 2.3, *Songs, Drones, and Refrains of Death*, Movements and groupings as presented in the score’s “Program Listing.”\(^{27}\)

In *Quest*, all movements are instrumental; the similarity of formal design to that of *Songs* suggests that the composer considers the *Refrain* movements not only introductory, but also a complement of “absolute” music to the following movements whose titles evoke poetic and symbolic meaning – even though Crumb himself admits about *Quest*, “there is no precise programmatic meaning implied.”\(^{28}\) Furthermore, the grouping format seen above in Example 2.2

\(^{28}\) Crumb, *Quest*, 2.
strongly influences the listener to experience the work in three large sections: Refrain I and movements I and II, Refrain II and movements III and IV, and Refrain III and movement V.

The Refrain movements typify Crumb’s approach to formal design. Each of the Refrain movements contains similar thematic material with the guitar as the focus of attention, and each refrain is based on repetitions of one formal section, creating a loosely strophic form. Christopher Rouse terms Crumb’s loose adaptation of strophic form “strophic variant form, which he describes as consisting of “a strophe – a melody, melodic gesture, or timbral effect – stated once. The strophe is then repeated, usually twice, with limited alterations of pitch and rhythms; these are the “variants.”” 29 Rouse adds, “Sometimes such a variant form will be preceded by an introduction which returns at the end of the movement.” This “return” is also seen in future movements of Quest on both a large and small scale. 30

This strophic variant form is the most obvious recurrent structure in Quest. In fact, it appears in almost every movement of the work in some capacity, whether (1) as the form of an entire movement, (2) followed by a coda or additional section, or even (3) as a sub-structure within a larger overall form. Strophic variant form will be the primary focus of this chapter on the form of Quest.

Refrain I is centered on a rapid open-string B ostinato in the guitar with sporadic ornamenting notes. This ostinato begins after an introductory figure that contains a rapid, downward, arpeggiated flush of dissonant pitch material in the harp, hammered dulcimer, and vibraphone. The first refrain contains four small sections of similarly repeated material. Each

30 Ibid. Rouse specifically cites Night of the Four Moons (1969), Ancient Voices of Children (1970), Madrigals, Books I and II (1965), and also includes “most of the miniature movements in Crumb’s music,” as adhering to “strophic variant” form as well as some being preceded by a returning introduction that appears at the end of the movement.
section of *Refrain 1*, after the very beginning, falls at a rehearsal number. It should be noted at this point that for the purposes of this discussion the lower-case alphabetic labels given to each formal section (a, a’, a’’, b, c, etc.) represent the material content related to the discussed movement only. These alphabetic labels do not carry over into other movements – even if the thematic material is similar among movements. Furthermore, upper-case alphabetic labels (A, A’, B, C, etc.) will refer to larger sections of formal diagrams within a movement. Example 2.4 diagrams the form of *Refrain 1*.

Example 2.4. *Quest*, “strophic variant” form in *Refrain 1* with rehearsal numbers designating sectional division.

The variation among the four sections is minimal, and simply involves the number of repeated notes, along with minor rhythmic variation of the ornaments that the guitar plays. In the other movements where strophic variant form is present, variation techniques tend to be more extensive, and include transposition of the pitch material, a device not found in the first refrain. (When such transposition does occur in the later movements, it invariably occurs at the tritone above.) However, in the *Refrain* movements the harp, hammered dulcimer, and vibraphone parts are exact repetitions in each section – providing a sort of “timbral placemat” for the varying concertante guitar part.

Further elaboration of the strophic variant form is found among other movements and incorporates brief episodes that fragment initial statements, and even coda sections that act as short cadenza-like passages for the guitar. *Refrain 2* is extremely similar to *Refrain 1* with
respect to its thematic content; the entire movement is transposed, as the ostinato pitch of the guitar is centered on D[^4], rather than the previous B[^4]. In fact, we will actually see that the relationship of a fourth is a significant interval throughout *Quest*. Although very similar to *Refrain 1*, small variations in the guitar’s rhythmic ornaments give this movement its own identity. Containing only two repeated sections, and resembling a truncated version of *Refrain 1*, this movement ends with a rhythmically augmented fragment of its opening gesture. The movement also incorporates a timbral “echo” which imitates and expands the guitar’s ostinato by using repeated octave pitches in the harp. (Example 2.5)

Example 2.5. *Quest*, strophic variant form with returning fragment of a section in *Refrain 2* with rehearsal numbers designating sectional division.

This type of return, where introductory material is referenced again at the end of the movement, is another common occurrence found in Crumb’s works.\(^{31}\) Rouse codifies and briefly discusses its role in the final movement of *Echoes of Time and the River*, and at the conclusion of *Ancient Voices of Children* with the return of the opening vocalise; in addition, it can also be seen with the returning “Sea Theme” in *Vox Balaenae*, and in the returning opening chords in *Makrokosmos I*.\(^{32}\) Such a return to material heard earlier in a movement or work would normally suggest a ternary structure of some sort, but since the material returns so briefly, in the form of rhythmically augmented fragments, it does not justify an independent sectional designation. Charles Rosen discusses this technique in *The Romantic Generation* and shows

---

\(^{32}\) Ibid.
how 18th and 19th century composers, such as Mozart, Beethoven, and Schumann, used it to define strong formal structure in their music. Using the term “self-reference,” Rosen believes the return of previously presented material reappearing later in a work is a device that provides a literal “memory” of themes and form – rather than being simply a direct return or recapitulation. Furthermore, in its resulting effect, he explains that a composer uses the device to create a perceived distance between the original presentation of a theme or idea and the later return, or “memory,” of it – as if one was returning home after many years of being away and remembering what is was once like before you left.33 We can attribute this same compositional device to Crumb as well as Quest contains returning material at the end of most movements. However, Crumb’s use of “self-reference” to provoke “memory” occurs in a slightly different way from 18th and 19th century composers. “Self-reference” in Crumb often involves literal returns to earlier stated material. However, like we will also see with his use of quotation, there is usually an element that distorts the “memory” and gives it a sense of imperfection. Besides simple transposition to a new pitch level, his “self-references” are known to incorporate: augmentation of the original rhythms, softer dynamics, ritardandos, and even incomplete fragments of the original figure that strongly implies the original, rather than actually presenting in its literal form. These effects create a type of “echo” of the original musical figures, and while earlier composers use “self-reference” to create a sense of returning home after a long departure from it, Crumb uses it to create the feeling of arriving someplace new that reminds you of home – rather than actually being there. This “reference late in a work to material heard earlier,” or

“self-reference,” found in Crumb’s music will be a formal device used in every movement, except for Refrains 1 and 3, in Quest.\textsuperscript{34}

Crumb uses strophic variant form once again in Refrain 3. This movement precedes the lengthy final movement, Nocturnal, and demonstrates another type of strophic variant form. After three similar sections (labeled a, a’ and a’’ in example 2.6) we encounter a solo cadenza-like passage for guitar. This section, labeled in Example 2.6 as “Coda,” concludes the Refrain movement.

Example 2.6. Quest, “strophic variant” form with Coda in Refrain 3 with rehearsal numbers designating sectional division.

Although its role is not always as it is in the Refrain movements, strophic variant form finds its way into the structures of the five larger movements as well. In these movements, strophic variant form appears not only in larger structures, but also as a smaller form within large sections, adding more formal complexity to Crumb’s musical landscape.

Using the second movement, Dark Paths, as an example, we can see how strophic variant form appears as a large-scale form resulting from the combination of several smaller sections. Although as in the refrains, in Dark Paths each rehearsal number tends to define a sectional division, in the first section of this movement rehearsal number 4 corresponds with the second musical gesture within this section, rather than to its beginning. (Rehearsal number 4 in the score of Quest does not correspond to the start of section a, which actually begins, at

\textsuperscript{34} Rouse, “The Music of George Crumb,” 78.
approximately 17 seconds in track 2 of the Bridge recording, with the African Talking Drum gestures that follow the introduction with the suspended cymbal and glissando timpani\textsuperscript{35}). The movement contains an introduction followed by three short sections that comprise a composite form, a, b, and c, each of which is defined by contrasting thematic content and alternating instrumentation. These three sections are then repeated in order, transposed at the tritone. These three sections, resulting in a second composite form, are labeled a’, b’, and c’ in Example 2.7.

The following coda, which begins at rehearsal number 10, contains the first appearance of Amazing Grace, which will be explored in chapter four. Finally, at the end of the coda a fragment of the “a” section results in another “self-reference” by Crumb. Example 2.7 diagrams the Dark Paths movement, and demonstrates how the smaller composite forms (a, b, and c) make up larger sections that reveal an overall strophic variant form on a large scale. In this diagram, the rehearsal numbers are placed below the sections in order to maintain the clarity of form relationships between the smaller and larger sections.

Example 2.7. Quest, a large-scale strophic variant, resulting from two composite forms, with introduction and coda in Dark Paths with rehearsal numbers designating sectional division.

\textsuperscript{35} Crumb, George. George Crumb: Quest; Federico’s Little Songs. Bridge Records Inc. #9069, © 1996 by Bridge Records Inc. Compact Disc.
The *Forgotten Dirges* movement provides another example of how Crumb uses strophic variant form as part of more complex structures. Following *Refrain 2*, this movement comprises a large-scale ternary form (A B A’) with a short introduction and coda. Each large section is a strophic variant form consisting of three smaller sections of similar material that are variations of one another, each two measures in length. The variations among the strophic variant sections involve transposition of pitch material by a perfect fourth, a minor second, and even a tritone. These transpositions do not always affect all of the instruments; some will maintain their pitch level, or transpose at a different interval, while other transpositions occur in the surrounding instrumental texture.

Rehearsal numbers in this movement are not a reliable indication of sectional divisions of the form. However, because Crumb uses an actual metered notation in this larger movement (instead of the *senza misura* in other movements), measure numbers (which are not provided in the score but which can be easily added) can be used to clearly display and diagram form.

As shown in the Example 2.8, a short introduction begins the movement and is then followed, starting at rehearsal 19, with three two-measure sections labeled a, a1, and a2. As already mentioned these three sections will make up the first large section (A) and relate to one another according to a clear strophic variant form. The first large section ends with a very brief return of the introduction material, at measure 10 (rehearsal number 21). This “quotation” of material previously presented at the beginning of the movement is a structural device common to the end of each large section of movement’s overall ternary form. Rouse points out that this structural device is very common in the works of George Crumb; in *Quest*, we see this not only

---

36 *Forgotten Dirges* is labeled movement three by the composer; however, its actual position in *Quest* is movement five in the entire work. See Example 2.2 for the listing of movements with their published labels.
several times in this movement, but also in *Dark Paths* and *Refrain 2*. Indeed, this referencing of previously introduced material at movement’s end occurs in five of the movement of the work, with the exception only of *Refrain 1*, *Refrain 3*, and the third movement, *Fugitive Sounds*.

As mentioned above, the form of *Forgotten Dirges* can be summarized as three large strophic variant structures followed by a brief coda. In the second section of this ternary structure, labeled section B in example 2.8, three more two-measure subsections, labeled b, b1, and b2, are based on thematic material that contrasts with the previous sections. In b2 the phrase is extended with a sequenced repetition of previously stated material. Finally, in the last section of the overall ternary form (A’) there are three more small sections that contain material derived from the a section at the beginning of the movement. Varying the material even further than in the previous A section of the ternary form, these sub-sections are labeled a3, a4, and a5, and make up the final strophic variant form of the movement. The movement then concludes with a brief two-measure coda that again uses material found earlier in the movement – this time, referencing material from the introduction. Example 2.8 diagrams this entire movement by showing the overall ternary form as well as the smaller-level strophic variant structures.

---

Example 2.8. Large-scale ternary structure in *Forgotten Dirges* with the smaller sub-sections showing strophic variant form.

As seen in the above examples, the extensive use of strophic variant form in *Quest* provides the clearest insight into Crumb’s formal procedures. It is a favorite of Crumb’s and is commonly found in a majority of his works since the early 1960’s. Whether used as the primary source of form in a movement or within a larger-scale design, strophic variant form, through its simple design, provides Crumb with a clear and undemanding canvas upon which he can exercise a rich and complex timbral palette - allowing his unique compositional voice to be clearly presented to the listener without further obstruction and confusion from complex forms.

---

38 Ibid.
III. PITCH MATERIAL AND PROCESS

A preliminary investigation of *Quest* may initially reveal many different, and seemingly unrelated, uses of pitch material, scale forms, and musical process; closer analysis, however, reveals that Crumb’s musical processes as they apply to pitch are unified by one central intervallic idea: a major third embedded within a perfect fourth. Crumb is able to generate all of the pitch material found in *Quest* from this simple motive and its many possible variants, emphasizing either its consonant or its dissonant aspects depending on the effect he desires in a given context. It will henceforth be referred to as the Quest motive.

The Quest motive is first found within the guitar part in *Refrain I*, where the melodic figure, Ab-G-C-B, emerges from the guitar’s initial ostinato on B⁴. Example 3.1 shows the emergence of this figure.

Example 3.1. *Quest*, the opening guitar part in *Refrain 1*, showing the first statement of the Quest motive. Used by permission of C.F. Peters Corporation, Copyright © 1996.

This figure as initially presented suggests a double incomplete upper neighbor-note figure that embellishes the pitches G and B, but if we consider the pitch content of the motive as a set,
positioning them into normal order as shown in Example 3.2, its full range of intervallic possibilities are revealed. The Quest motive is a member of set class 4-7 (0145); this means that it includes two semitones, a minor third, two major thirds, and a perfect fourth – or their inversions and compounds - and contains no whole steps or tritones. The relative prominence of semitones and major thirds becomes a central feature of the pitch vocabulary of *Quest*. As Example 3.3 illustrates, set class 4-7 (0145) is a symmetrical structure consisting, in its normal form, of two minor seconds separated by a minor third.

Example 3.2. Pitches from the guitar’s first melodic figure, from *Refrain 1*, rearranged in best normal order, and showing the intervals of a perfect fourth (P4) and a major thirds (M3).

Example 3.3. Normal form of the Quest motive as heard in the guitar’s first melodic figure in *Refrain 1*, showing the symmetrical disposition of minor seconds (m2) around the motive’s lone minor third (m3).

---

The following analysis of pitch material in *Quest* will assume enharmonic equivalence of notes of the same pitch class that Crumb spells differently; except perhaps in passages that feature prominent tonal quotations, his music seems to inhabit a completely chromatic world, sometimes rendered slightly more complex through microtonal inflection.\(^{40}\)

Crumb generates the guitar line in *Refrain I*, which consists of a series of brief melodic figures diverging from the pervasive ostinato on B\(^4\), from the intervals drawn from the Quest motive. Some of these retain membership in, or are subsets of, the referential 4-7 (0145) form of the Quest motive, while others, which result from new combinations of the motive’s component intervals, do not. In the examples below, Examples 3.4a and 3.4b, the results are small pitch sets, each a subset of the Quest motive’s 4-7 (0145), that include the central motive (labeled “a”) expanded by a minor second (“b” and “g”), and then a short gesture containing two minor seconds (“c”). In following section of the strophic variant form, this motive also exploits perfect fourths in an ascending pattern (“d” and “e”), as well as the interval of a minor third juxtaposed with a minor second (“f”).

---

\(^{40}\) Crumb’s spellings of pitch classes seem intended, for the most part, to facilitate performance; given two possible pitch spellings such as C# and Db, Crumb seems to prefer the one that occurs in “easier” keys, i.e. C#, which is familiar from keys like D major and D minor, over the one that occurs in “harder” keys, i.e. Db, which occurs in keys like Ab major and F minor.
Example 3.4a. *Quest*, pitch sets generated from the central motive (labeled “a”) in the first two sections of *Refrain 1* – extracted from the score (guitar part).

Used by permission of C.F. Peters Corporation, Copyright © 1996.

Example 3.4b. Pitch sets generated from the central motive set (“a”) in the first two sections of *Refrain 1* (guitar part).

In the following *Refrain* movements, which are modified variations of *Refrain 1*, the motivic combination of major third and perfect fourth appears frequently in the guitar part, sometimes yielding straightforward transformations of the Quest motive, sometimes introducing more distant derivatives. Example 3.5 shows a reappearance of the Quest motive in the guitar
part during the opening section of *Refrain 2*, while Example 3.6 develops the motive by presenting two overlapping occurrences of the motive’s component intervals in *Refrain 3*.

Crumb generates some of the most important musical gestures in *Quest* by using this perfect fourth/major third motive in various creative and hidden ways. Analysis of the pitch class content of these musical gestures reveals close connections with the Quest motive and its intervallic components. Two further ways in which the latter are varied and developed involves the substitution of a minor third for the major third, or a tritone – an augmented fourth or diminished fifth – for the motive’s perfect fourth.

**Refrain 2**

Example 3.5. *Quest*, pitches from the guitar’s first melodic figure, from *Refrain 2*, reordered to display intervallic derivation from the Quest motive. Used by permission of C.F. Peters Corporation, Copyright © 1996.
Example 3.6. *Quest*, pitches from the guitar’s first melodic figure, from *Refrain 3*, reordered to display intervallic derivation from the Quest motive. Used by permission of C.F. Peters Corporation, Copyright © 1996.

The expansive opening gesture that begins *Fugitive Sounds*, the movement that immediately follows *Dark Paths*, is also derived from the perfect fourth/major third motive set. Rich in tritones and minor thirds, the opening may be considered the product of three pitch class sets, labeled A, B and C in Example 3.7. Set A duplicates the original motive at its original pitch level, while B is a clear derivative; C, the vibraphone’s ascending figure, is a symmetrical flourish that joins two augmented triads a minor third apart, thus developing the major third component of the motive.
Example 3.7. *Quest*, opening gesture from *Fugitive Sounds* (measure 1) with resulting pitch sets (A and B), and additional references to major thirds (C) related to the Quest motive. Used by permission of C.F. Peters Corporation, Copyright © 1996.

The gesture in the example above is also used throughout the movement as a formal device (another instance “self-reference”) to define the beginning of several sections. At each reference following the opening statement it is presented usually at a new pitch level. This occurs at rehearsal number 12, four measures after rehearsal number 12, at rehearsal number 16,
and three measures after rehearsal number 16. Later in the movement, at one, and four, measures after rehearsal number 17, the ascending guitar figure from that gesture is extracted and used to create a variant of the original. The variant guitar figure, along with a complementing figure in the marimba, exploits the intervals of a major third (two of them) and a compound perfect fourth that exists in the boundaries of the original statement. The first variant, one measure after rehearsal number 17, is seen in a later example, Example 3.10, and used to further support the intervallic connection to the Quest motive.

In a chordal passage in this same movement (measure following rehearsal number 11), Crumb accompanies a soprano saxophone melody with harp chords derived from the central motive voiced to emphasize perfect fourths. Individually the three chords, presented in descending sequence, don’t seem to have any overt connection to the central motive. Example 3.8, however, clarifies the relationship. Note that here Crumb substitutes a minor third for the Quest motive’s major third.

Example 3.8. *Quest*, harp part at rehearsal number 11 in *Fugitive Sounds* with reduction of voices showing intervallic relationships to Quest motive. Used by permission of C.F. Peters Corporation, Copyright © 1996.
In this same movement, as already seen in Example 3.7 in the vibraphone gesture (labeled C), Crumb extracts the major third interval from the central motive set and makes it an important feature in the guitar’s rapid figurations. These arpeggiated figures are prominent in both Fugitive Sounds movements, and also make very brief appearances in some others. The gesture consists of several patterns of three thirty-second-note triplet cells that ascend and descend throughout the guitar’s range. Each three-note group is usually separated from the next by a minor third - although an augmented fourth (the equivalent of two minor thirds combined) serves this dividing function in the first occurrence of this figure in the movement.

As seen in Example 3.9, the separating minor third interval does break the expected series, but it is used in order for the major third pattern to continue without repeating at the octave. The augmented fourth is used to emphasize the uppermost pitch in each part of the ascending pattern – first E⁶ and then G⁶.

Example 3.9. Quest, mm.10-11 from Fugitive Sounds, and a reduction showing the resulting intervals in the guitar’s line. Used by permission of C.F. Peters Corporation, Copyright © 1996.

As mentioned previously, the guitar has a passage near the end of this movement that contains similarities to Example 3.9. In the measure after rehearsal number 17, and again three measures later, there is a variant of the vibraphone’s set C, from the beginning of the movement.
that also sounds like a fragment from the guitar’s more continuous solos between rehearsal numbers 11 and 12, 13 and 14, and 15 and 16. Example 3.10 illustrates. Here the development of the major third idea continues from the guitar to the marimba. The major third idea has now expanded across several octaves, and across instruments. The interval between the guitar figure’s two boundary pitches, $D^4$ to $G^6$, is a compound perfect fourth – which is part of the Quest motive – spread across most of the guitar’s range.

Example 3.10. *Quest*, intervals from the Quest motive occurring among the guitar and the marimba parts from *Fugitive Sounds* (one measure after rehearsal number 17). Used by permission of C.F. Peters Corporation, Copyright © 1996.

The perfect fourth and major/minor third are also used together to build harmonic structures in many passages in *Quest*. This is most evident in the guitar’s chordal passages. The most active use of guitar chords is found in the *Forgotten Dirges* movement. In the opening measures of the movement at rehearsal number 19, and used in almost exact restatement in alternating sections, the guitar plays a rhythmic series of chords built on intervals of fourths and thirds of varied qualities. Some of the thirds in this texture appear as minor intervals, while several of the fourths appear as tritones (labeled “TT” in Example 3.11).
Example 3.11. *Quest*, guitar chords built on thirds and fourths in *Forgotten Dirges* at rehearsal number 14 (repeated chords are not analyzed). Used by permission of C.F. Peters Corporation, Copyright © 1996.

As illustrated above therefore, this basic motive of a major third interval embedded within the interval of a perfect fourth generates a majority of the material found in the *Quest*.

The ultimate source of these two intervals as generative factors in the work seems to be the standard tuning of the guitar. The guitar’s bottom four strings are tuned in perfect fourths (E\(^2\)-A\(^2\)-D\(^3\)-G\(^3\)); the fifth string (B\(^3\)) is tuned a major third above the fourth, and the sixth string (E\(^4\)) is tuned a perfect fourth above the fifth. The inner strings (D\(^3\)-G\(^3\)-B\(^3\)) are particularly significant as a point of reference for the *Quest* motive and materials derived from it. Example 3.12 illustrates the open strings of the guitar and its corresponding notation.
Example 3.12. Standard diagram of the guitar’s open strings showing string numbers and corresponding pitches, as well as the sounding pitches with the perfect fourth D\(^3\)-G\(^3\) and major third G\(^3\)-B\(^3\) emphasized.

The standard tuning of the guitar influences the pitch levels at which many of the important harmonic and melodic ideas found in *Quest* occur. Furthermore, the pentatonic scale on G (Example 3.13), which consists of the pitch classes represented by the tuning of the guitar’s strings, is an important referential collection in the work.\(^{41}\) The most important use of the pentatonic scale occurs in conjunction with Crumb’s quotation of the hymn tune *Amazing Grace*, which will be explored in detail in Chapter 4 of this analysis.

\(^{41}\) The “pentatonic scale” referred to here, and throughout this analysis, is meant to describe an anhemitonic pentatonic scale. This means the pitches for this scale can be derived from a diatonic major scale that omits the fourth and seventh scale degrees – resulting in a scale that consists of five notes with no semitones. Starting on the pitch of C, the anhemitonic pentatonic scale would contain the pitches C, D, E, G, and A.
Example 3.13. Pentatonic scale on G derived from the open string notes of the guitar’s standard tuning.

If we reorder these five pitch classes in a different way, we find that the pentatonic scale in this arrangement is symmetrical; it may be considered as two pairs of perfect fourths on either side of a central major third (Example 3.14).

Example 3.14. Pentatonic scale on G reordered to show a symmetrical relationship and the intervals of a major third and perfect fourth.

The intervals found among the inner strings (D, G, and B) also impact another aspect of the musical language that Crumb uses this work. The intervals yielded by these strings also generate another composition tool that is used widely in *Quest*: the octatonic, or alternating whole step/half step scale. Crumb uses all three forms of the octatonic scale throughout *Quest*:

---

42 The octatonic scale is an eight note scale that is built from a resulting pattern of either alternating half-steps and whole-steps, or alternating whole-steps and half-steps. Certain 19th century Russian composers, notably Rimsky-Korsakov, were among the first to make use of this scale, and in the twentieth-century, composers such as Alexander Scriabin, Igor Stravinsky, Bela Bartok, and Olivier Messiaen have regularly incorporated the octatonic scale into their compositions. The scale has also found popularity among contemporary jazz styles where it is
a whole-step/half-step scale pattern starting on C (transposition 1), a half-step/whole step scale pattern starting on C (transposition 2), and a half-step/whole-step scale pattern starting on C# (transposition 3). Example 3.15 shows all three forms of the octatonic scale.

Example 3.15. Three forms of the octatonic scale.

These three forms of the octatonic scale are the only possible transpositions of this scale. Composer Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) includes the octatonic scale as one of his “modes of limited transposition,” and Crumb admits that Messiaen is among many composers who have had an influence in his music.

---


Crumb, 1999.
Aurally, the pentatonic scale may seem unrelated and in complete contrast to the octatonic scale – and indeed in isolated comparison, they are. In *Quest*, however, Crumb not only makes a strong connection between these two scales, but he uses one to generate the pitches of the other.

Consider isolating the pitch classes D, G and B, derived, as noted above, from the guitar’s fourth, third, and second strings, and the intervals that result from their juxtaposition, the perfect fourth D-G and the major third G-B. Duplicating this intervallic pattern until the first pitch class repetition yields the pitch class content of octatonic transposition 3, as illustrated in Example 3.16.

Example 3.16. Octatonic scale (transposition 3) derived from a repeated pattern of a perfect fourth followed by a major third.

The connection between two very contrasting ideas – the central Quest motive and the octatonic scale – is typical of many of Crumb’s compositions. It is very characteristic of his style to juxtapose two ideas (whether involved with scales, pitch centers, or instrumental timbres), and the composer has often mentioned his obsession with combining elements that are
in direct opposition with one another. In an interview in Robert Duckworth, John Harvey, and Julie Powell, he admits,

> My music always has this kind of dual sense about it. Maybe it comes from some of the models I've followed. I hear this quality in Mahler's music. There is sometimes kind of a folk-like quality, and yet underneath there is an underlying irony that is implied in his music. I find most music, the music I love most, always seems to have both sides to it.  

Forcing elements that traditionally would not be related to one another to work together is one of the most interesting, and most cunning, aspects of Crumb’s music. We will also see this duality of elements in the next chapter when we investigate Crumb’s use of musical quotation.

The octatonic scale is an even stronger presence in *Quest* than the Quest motive itself. Whenever possible, when Crumb uses either octatonic material or material derived from the central motive to define a gesture, he carefully arranges them to emphasize as many fourths – both perfect and augmented – as possible. While the perfect fourth is derived from the motivic entities that stem from the guitar’s standard tuning (and thus from the pentatonic scale), the augmented fourth (tritone) is derived from the octatonic scale. Crumb exploits this dualism, and the possible alternate derivation of the perfect fourth from the octatonic collection, throughout the work. For example, the opening of the *Dark Paths* movement is built around the dichotomy between the augmented and perfect fourths. The movement begins with a slow glissando between the notes E\(^2\) and Bb\(^2\) in the timpani, followed by a rhythmically and registrally fluctuating harp figure built around a projection of fourths, E\(^2\)-A\(^2\)-D\(^3\)-C\(^4\)-F\(^4\), clearly derived from the tuning of the guitar’s four lowest strings, which happens to be the same as the tuning of the strings of the contrabass (although an octave higher). This figure, as well as the widely used

---

intervals of a perfect fourth throughout this movement, foreshadows the appearance of the
Amazing Grace quotation – which is heavily influenced by the interval of a perfect fourth, and
structured around the pentatonic scale. Again, this scale and quotation will be discussed in the
next chapter. The harp’s figure using exclusive perfect fourths is shown in Example 3.17.

Example 3.17. Quest, harp passage in Dark Paths (at rehearsal number 4) containing exclusive
use of perfect fourths. Used by permission of C.F. Peters Corporation, Copyright © 1996.

The first use of the octatonic scale in the work appears in the very opening of Quest, in
Refrain I. The opening gesture, performed on the Appalachian hammered dulcimer and echoed
by held chords in the vibraphone and harp, includes seven of eight notes of transposition 1 of the
octatonic scale. The missing C-natural that completes the collection arrives shortly thereafter as
part of the guitar’s first melodic figure, where it connects the Quest motive with this octatonic
gesture. (Example 3.18)
Example 3.18. *Quest*, opening gesture in *Refrain I* with the pitches of the octatonic scale (transposition 2) identified. Used by permission of C.F. Peters Corporation, Copyright © 1996.

Having a missing pitch from a referential collection or sonority be supplied by another musical gesture slightly later in the piece to complete the set is a consistent technique that Crumb uses in the opening of all three *Refrain* movements. Indeed, pitch- and pitch-class-specific connections occur throughout the work. This C plays a strong role within the guitar part of *Refrain I*, occurring in every one of the musical gestures that deviate from the ostinato B, and functioning as a quick upper-neighbor embellishment that helps define the ostinato pitch with much strength and emphasis. Because it, like most of the rest of the pitch material in *Refrain I*, is registrally frozen (i.e. it occurs as C⁴ throughout the refrain), its return as part of the harp’s
figure in the next movement forms an audible connection between the two sections. Such registral fixedness helps reinforce the motivic role of perfect fourths and major thirds that we have already noted above.

In the movement entitled *Fugitive Sounds*, two forms of the octatonic scale are found in the first section among the melodic figures in the soprano saxophone and guitar parts. The soprano saxophone utilizes transposition 2 of the octatonic scale; while the guitar’s imitative gesture uses transposition 1. Many of the pitches in this figure are arranged to clearly project the interval of a perfect fourth. (Example 3.19)

![Example 3.19. Quest, melodic figures in the soprano saxophone (concert pitch) and guitar parts in the opening section of movement Fugitive Sounds. Used by permission of C.F. Peters Corporation, Copyright © 1996.](image)

The octatonic scale is also prominent in the final movement, *Nocturnal*. Here droning fifths accompany the “Amazing Grace” quotation. At rehearsal number 35, *Andantino piacevole; quasi “Serenata,”* the vibraphone alternates a sequential melodic pattern that it
doubles in perfect fifths with the guitar, harp, contrabass, and hammered dulcimer. Although perfect fifths are the most prominent feature of this melody, the notes of the vibraphone’s melody form transposition 3 of the octatonic scale. (Example 3.20).

Example 3.20. *Quest*, vibraphone part at rehearsal 35 in *Nocturnal* revealing an octatonic scale used in the context of a sequencing gesture that contains perfect fifths. Used by permission of C.F. Peters Corporation, Copyright © 1996.

Creating gestures and textures from the octatonic collection while at the same time incorporating the intervals of the Quest motive, is one of Crumb’s favorite ways of maintaining consistency and unity throughout the work. In the second movement, *Dark Paths*, the soprano saxophone’s melodic statements include strong octatonic references. Example 3.21 shows one such reference; basically, here and in the other movements, whenever a figure or gesture is not pentatonic, its pitch materials tend to be drawn from subsets of the octatonic scale.

Octatonic fragments occur throughout the next movement, *Fugitive Sounds*. The guitar’s first sustained solo, starting at measure 10, incorporates arpeggios of ascending and descending intervals of three major thirds – with each grouped interval pattern interrupted by a minor third (as seen previously in Example 3.11). A sequential pattern of eight thirty-second note groups that produce a chromatic pitch collection spanning a tritone follows these arpeggiated figures in measures 12 and 13. Each eight-note pattern includes two fragments of the octatonic collection. In Example 3.22, the entire sequence is shown, but for clarity the octatonic content of only the first statement of the figure is shown.
Example 3.22. *Quest*, guitar part in measures 12 and 13 of *Fugitive Sounds* revealing two fragments of octatonic transpositions 1 and 2. Used by permission of C.F. Peters Corporation, Copyright © 1996.

Finally, in the *Refrain* movements Crumb makes prominent use of the diminished seventh chord, one of the most important sub-sets of the octatonic collection. This chord, and fragments of it, is found throughout the contrabass part. In *Refrain I*, the slowly unfolding bass notes outline the fully diminished seventh arpeggio descending from B♭1 to C♯1. *Refrain II* recalls this figure with an overall bass line that features the interval C♯2/B♭1. In the final *Refrain* movement the overall bass line outlines the diminished triad F♯2/E♭2/A1. Example 3.23 illustrates this.
We have seen, therefore, that the intervals of the ubiquitous Quest motive, the perfect fourth and major third, are ultimately influenced by the standard tuning of the guitar’s strings. Its component intervals also generate other scales and pitch collections, such as the pentatonic and the three forms of the octatonic. Crumb uses these two scales to create juxtapositions and tensions throughout the work, as well as a pervasive unity of gesture. Each of the two scales is dependent on the other; the presence of one leads the listener to anticipate the arrival of the other.

The fascination of *Quest*, however, lies not only in Crumb’s subtle manipulation of the central motive, or in the influence of the guitar, or the dichotomy of pentatonic and octatonic; in addition, Crumb’s characteristic use of musical quotation gives the work an intriguing, allusive quality that makes it typical of his best works. The final chapter explores this process.
IV. USE OF MUSICAL QUOTATION: “AMAZING GRACE”

Beginning with the 1967 orchestral work *Echoes of Time and the River*, where he quotes the hymn “Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?”, George Crumb uses quotation as a compositional technique in many of his works. Crumb’s use of musical quotation can be described as a way of conjuring up certain moods, a means of reaching outside his music to allude to a larger reality, and as a method of introducing temporary moments of tonal clarity. The effect of Crumb’s quotations is often similar to a clearing fog that reveals a familiar image from afar that is soon engulfed again by the surrounding mist, among a complex landscape of disparate sounds. In *Quest*, Crumb uses the famous hymn tune *Amazing Grace* as the focal point of the composition, presenting phrases or smaller fragments of the tune at various points throughout the work.

Although they are always recognizable, Crumb’s musical quotations typically contain, as Crumb himself has stated during a lecture at Louisiana State University in 1999, “some element of distortion.” These distortional elements include bitonal or heterophonic opposition to the accompanying harmony or established tonal center; the scoring of the quotation for non-traditional instruments or for traditional instruments using non-traditional or extended techniques; and the placing of the quotation among contrasting, incongruous accompanying timbres. These distortive elements seem to give dynamic life to themes and melodies that might otherwise seem static and somewhat predictable due to their familiarity, and they tend to defamiliarize Crumb’s allusions to familiar tonal repertoire. Concerning his quotations of *Amazing Grace* in *Quest*, the composer states “you don’t expect to hear it on the saxophone against a

---

47 Crumb, 1999.
cloud of Japanese bells.” Furthermore, the composer clearly describes this dynamic setting of the hymn tune in the program notes for *Quest* by saying,

There is one use of musical quotation in the work: phrases from the famous hymn tune *Amazing Grace* are played by the soprano saxophone -- initially, at the conclusion of *Dark Paths* (over a delicate web of percussion sonority), and finally, in *Nocturnal* (over a sequentially slowing ostinato of bare fifths in the harp and contrabass). On the very last page of the score a distant echo of the tune is intoned by a harmonica, or, as in this recording, a concertina.

The *Amazing Grace* quotation is obviously an important focal point in *Quest*. Although it may seem like a tune that was arbitrarily selected to add contrast, interest, and familiarity to the work by the composer, this analysis will reveal that its role in the work is much deeper.

*Amazing Grace* is a well-known Christian hymn written in late 1772 and credited to John Newton (1725-1807), a British Anglican priest and former slave trader. Appearing in several popular early American hymnbooks, including Newton’s *Olney Hymns* (1779) and William Walker’s *Southern Harmony* (1835), the tune became – and since then has remained – a favorite due to its association with the Christian idea of “divine grace.” Through the nineteenth century it appeared in more and more hymnals, and in the twentieth century rose to become a gospel and folk standard (Arlo Guthrie performed it at Woodstock in 1969, and Judy Collins's 1970 a capella recording dominated the UK charts for 67 weeks). In the 1960s the song’s lyrics

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
\[\text{Crumb, *Quest*, 2.}\]
\[\text{Promoted as “three days of music and peace,” the Woodstock Music and Art Fair was held at Max Yasgur's 600 acre dairy farm in the town of Bethel, New York from August 15 to August 17, 1969. Thirty-two of the best-known rock and pop musicians of this time period appeared during the weekend festival which embodied the counterculture of the 1960s and the "hippie era." David P. Szatmary, *Rockin’ In Time: A Social History of Rock and Roll* (New}\]
gained new relevance to human rights and freedom. In 1972, an instrumental version by the
Pipes and Drums and Military Band of the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards popularized the song
for bagpipes and maintained the number one spot for five weeks, and spent a total of twenty-
seven weeks on the UK charts.\(^5\) Crumb does not make any clear connections between the
Christian associations of the tune and any programmatic or symbolic meaning of Quest, but one
cannot help but assume some type of significant connection between these two elements.\(^5\)

The possible nature of this connection will be explored later in this chapter.

The simple melody of the tune spans the range of one octave; the absence of the fourth
and seventh scale steps makes it a pentatonic melody. Example 4.1 presents the Amazing Grace
melody in C major. Example 4.2 then extracts the pentatonic scale in C from the previous
example.

![Example 4.1. Amazing Grace, showing phrase structure.](image)

---

\(^5\) Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2007), 198; Joan Baez’ single in 1970 is cited online at
\(^5\) In the program notes of Quest, Crumb states, “...although the movement titles are
poetic and symbolic, there is no precise programmatic meaning implied.” Crumb, Quest, 2.
\(^5\) Transcribed from Walter Ehret, Melinda Edwards, and George K. Evans, The
Example 4.2. Pentatonic scale on C.

It will be no surprise after our previous discussion of the Quest motive and the tuning of the guitar to discover that the pentatonic scale of *Amazing Grace* contains both a perfect fourth and a major third; when this pentatonic scale is re-ordered as a symmetrical set, the perfect fourth serves as a primary interval, the major third an axis of symmetry (Example 4.3).

Example 4.3. Pentatonic scale on C rearranged in a symmetrical set, and displaying the intervals of a perfect fourth.

As we have seen, several musical passages in *Quest* are clearly derived from the pentatonic scale. In *Forgotten Dirges* the pentatonic scale is used to generate a guitar passage that appears several times in repetition and expansion within the movement. In the measure after rehearsal number 21, the guitar plays a passage that contains two pentatonic scales: one in Db and another in Gb. It is also interesting to note that the relationship between the centers of the two pentatonic references is a perfect fourth; moreover, the bottom voice in the passage outlines the perfect fourth sequence E-A-D.
Later on in the same movement, one measure after rehearsal number 23, the hammered dulcimer uses two other pentatonic scales – one in G, and another in C - to derive a similar ascending and descending figure. Again, the relationship between these two scales is a perfect fourth. Above this figure, in the harp’s muted countermelody, another reference is made to a pentatonic scale in Gb. By using the pentatonic scale so prominently in this movement, Crumb foreshadows the *Amazing Grace* quotation and associated pentatonic materials that appear in the final movement, *Nocturnal*.

Crumb generates most of the musical figures and melodies in *Nocturnal* from the pentatonic. It is also no coincidence that this movement is the one that features the *Amazing Grace* quotation almost exclusively. The pentatonic scale is very prominent from the very beginning of the *Nocturnal* movement; each gesture on the first two pages contains a different transposition of the pentatonic scale. Even the chordal figures in the vibraphone reference two different pentatonic scales. Example 4.5 illustrates.
Example 4.5. *Quest*, use of pentatonic scales in the opening section of *Nocturnal.*

The pentatonic scale and the *Amazing Grace* tune also have a strong connection to the tuning of the guitar, as comparison of Examples 3.12 and 4.1 shows. We also saw in the previous chapter that the pitches from the guitar’s open strings can be rearranged to form a pentatonic scale built on G. Connecting these two elements together (the guitar’s open strings and the *Amazing Grace* melody, as well as with the intervals that are found in the Quest motive) now becomes very obvious. In fact, one can actually play the *Amazing Grace* melody using only the open strings of the guitar (considering several octave displacements). Example 4.6 demonstrates this.
Example 4.6. *Amazing Grace* melody (transposed to G pentatonic) realized by using only the open strings on the guitar (string numbers of the guitar are indicated above the notes).

*Amazing Grace* first appears in *Quest* in the second movement, *Dark Paths*. Appearing briefly at the end of this movement, at rehearsal number 10, the quotation contains only the first two phrases of the popular tune, and is played by the soprano saxophone. The tune is also placed against contrasting timbres in the percussion that consist of a large and medium tam-tam, and four Japanese temple bells. In fact, at each later appearance of the *Amazing Grace*, in the final movement, the Japanese temple bells are included among the instrumentation that accompanies the tune. This juxtaposition of unusual instrumental pairings is one of the “distortive elements” that Crumb himself refers to when describing his use of quotation. Another technique of this “distortion,” along with its overall intentions, will be discussed in the later appearance of the *Amazing Grace* in the final movement, *Nocturnal*.

In *Dark Paths*, at the appearance of the quotation, Crumb indicates the expression mark “misterioso” and further indicates, “as from afar.” The desired effect in this setting, and in its later appearances, is one of transparency – especially as the dynamic marking for this entire passage is triple piano (**ppp**). The very soft presentation of sounds found in this passage, along

---

56 Crumb, 1999.
with the triplet and quintuplet borrowed rhythms in both the bells and the saxophone, also presents a somewhat free rhythmic character that seems almost mystic in quality. As mentioned before, the quotation concludes the movement, and it serves not only as a musical reference, but also as a moment of clarification — a place where a clear and functional tonal language emerges out of a previously complex and dissonant musical landscape. This moment of clarification is brief, and does not occur again until the final movement; here Crumb is foreshadowing its arrival later on in the work.


Even though some element of “distortion” exists in Crumb’s setting of a musical quote, he is also capable of giving it a very clear presentation. The quotation of *Amazing Grace* in *Quest* is not masked or concealed, but presented directly to the listener without textural obstruction from the other instruments. In the previous example it can be seen that the instrumentation is sparse and contains instruments of a different musical family (percussion) from the quotation instrument, the soprano saxophone (woodwind). Crumb obviously wants the listener to perceive clearly this moment of musical reference. In fact, in a notational practice that
he uses in many of his other works he places the musical reference within quotation marks that are notated above the passage (Schmidt, 2005, 172). This is also seen in Example 4.7.

The *Amazing Grace* quotation does not appear again until the final movement, *Nocturnal*. In its first statement in this movement it appears in its entirety; in following appearances fragments of the tune’s phrases occur. The sections of *Nocturnal* containing the quotation appear three times between the larger sections of the movement and function as the refrains of an overall rondo-like form. The appearances of *Amazing Grace* in *Nocturnal* occur with a similar accompaniment each time: an open fifth dyad in the contrabass and harp plus Japanese bells that alternate with the quotation, which is heard in the soprano saxophone throughout the movement, with the exception of its last appearance where it is played by a harmonica. This transformation of timbre will be explored further at the end of this chapter.

At rehearsal number 33, at the first appearance of the quotation in *Nocturnal*, open fifths in the harp reinforced by a contrabass doubling accompany the soprano saxophone quotation. The *Amazing Grace* melody in the saxophone is set in Db pentatonic and the open fifth dyads play a repeated low ostinato pattern consisting of notes from the pentatonic scale on G (again evoking the open strings on the guitar). Japanese bells eventually appear in this section and alternate with the phrases with the quotation; a very soft punctuation by a large suspended cymbal highlights that gesture.

The same three open fifth dyads (E$^1$/B$^1$, G$^1$/D$^2$, and A$^1$/E$^2$), found in the harp and contrabass and played in the same repeated pattern in the above example, also accompany each subsequent appearance of the *Amazing Grace* quote in the movement. This pattern of pitches even maintains itself when the quotation’s pitch level changes. Throughout the final movement the quotation is presented at several pitch levels, implying different pentatonic tonalities. First, as seen above in Example 4.8, the quotation occurs in Db pentatonic (concert pitch). Later, at rehearsal number 37, fragments of it occur first in Bb and then in Ab; the final presentation, at rehearsal number 42, is in Gb pentatonic. The conflicting pitch centers between the quotation and the open fifth accompaniment patterns create a strong separation between the two elements, clearly setting off the quotation from its surroundings. Again, Crumb’s uses of quotation are very direct and clear, befitting their important role in his works.
The several presentations of the quotation also play an extremely important role in overall compositional integration. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Crumb’s technique of “self-reference” provides the listener with a sense of familiarity, as well as a sense of thematic return to an earlier experience – a return distorted by some element of aesthetic distance. This concept also applies to his use of quotation.

When we first encounter the *Amazing Grace* tune (in *Dark Paths*) it is presented in fragmented form, using only the first two phrases. The tune is accompanied by Japanese bells with punctuation by tam-tams. When the tune emerges again in the final movement of *Quest*, it appears juxtaposed with open fifths in the harp and contrabass (along with the Japanese bells) that imply a sense of tonal center in the musical landscape – albeit a tonal center in opposition to the tonality of the *Amazing Grace* quotation. Since the first appearance of *Amazing Grace*, at the beginning of the work, was in Bb (concert pitch) this remains the listener’s frame of reference for the tune throughout its subsequent appearances. Although this clear presentation of a familiar melody in a clearly delineated tonality is briefly satisfying, it also establishes an expectation that the entire tune will appear at some point later in the work, resolving the incompleteness of this initial statement. When the quote reappears in *Nocturnal*, starting at rehearsal number 33, the tonal centers of the tune (presented in Bb, Ab, and finally Gb – a relationship reflecting the intervals in the *Quest* motive) are strongly undermined by the dissonance between these tonal centers and the underlying harp/contrabass open fifths, which imply G pentatonic. The opposition of these two tonal centers adds an element of “distortion” that provides the listener with a sense of return to the memorable landscape previously encountered in the earlier movement, but at the same time undercuts that sense of return. The familiar surroundings evoked by the tune’s previous, less tonally problematic presentation have
now been altered – thus frustrating the listener’s expectations of resolution and completion. Furthermore, when the instrumentation of the quotation changes at the end of the movement at rehearsal number 42 (which is also the culmination of the compositional trajectory of the entire work), another transformation has occurred. *Amazing Grace*, which throughout the work has appeared in the soprano saxophone, is now transferred to the chromatic harmonica. In addition to the tonal distance between the tune’s earlier presentations and the final statements – which use the last three phrases of the hymn tune – at rehearsal numbers 42 and 43 (in Gb pentatonic against a drone on G and D, its most dissonant setting yet), this change of instrumentation adds an element of timbral and intonational distance, further de-familiarizing this seemingly familiar musical object. While limited in its content, Example 4.9 diagrams the overall form found in *Nocturnal* and emphasizes the appearances of the *Amazing Grace* quotation – showing the phrases used in each statement. While this form does not exactly adhere to a true sonata rondo, the overall structure does allude to recapitulatory form through the sonata principle. Notice that the quotation statements function as the repeating A sections of the overall form, and the *Amazing Grace* quotation has gradually unfolded from its first statement in *Dark Paths*, and continuing throughout this movement. Following this, Example 4.10 shows the penultimate appearance of the *Amazing Grace* starting at rehearsal number 42.
Example 4.9. Overall form of *Nocturnal* with details of phrase use (from Example 4.1) and tonal centers included in the sections containing the musical quotation, *Amazing Grace.*
Example 4.10. *Quest*, final presentations of the *Amazing Grace* quotation as seen in *Nocturnal* at rehearsal number 42. Copyright © 1996 by C.F. Peters Corporation. Used by permission.

Symbolically, the appearances and reappearances of the quotation have an overall importance not only as a structural marker, but also as an evocation of memory and of the ways in which memory distorts the past – similar to the concept of “self-reference” that Crumb uses as a compositional technique that was discussed in an earlier chapter. The quotation not only serves as a familiar focal point for the listener, but it also acts as a narrative in which the unfolding of the quotation throughout the work becomes a representation of an actual “quest” towards a final goal. Crumb does not give us any concrete clues as to what sort of quest this could be, or what its symbolic, allegorical, or metaphorical significance might be – and overall, there’s a beauty to
such an open-ended meaning. Listeners and students of Crumb’s music can speculate anew as to the goal of Crumb’s “quest” each time they listen to the work. Regardless of this, any interpretation of a “journey” (or “quest”) finds itself suggesting the idea of “ultimate triumph” over a long and testing voyage – or of an overall greater awareness and personal development after a rite of passage. As the writer Joseph W. Campbell states in his study of mythology The Hero with a Thousand Faces,

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.\textsuperscript{57}

In the first appearance of the quotation from Amazing Grace in Dark Paths, phrases A and A’ are presented with no opposition of other pitch elements. The presentation here foreshadows the use of the Amazing Grace in the last movement. Then, in Nocturnal, the quotation appears several times. First, at rehearsal numbers 33 and 34, it is presented in its entirety – using all of the tune’s phrases. Each phrase here presents itself in alternation with the ostinato in fifths and Temple bell music previously mentioned. At rehearsal numbers 37 and 38, the quotation melody, using phrases A’ and B this time, appears once again. In this presentation Crumb alternates each phrase as well – but distorts it this time with brief dissonant melodic figures in the saxophone. These figures can be best described as both containing a pitch class set of [014] (the first starting on E; the next one on D) that distort and oppose the quotation by a tritone (since A’ is in Bb pentatonic, and B is in Ab pentatonic). Further distorting this context, both figures also include a quarter-tone pitch functioning as an upper neighbor to the G# (concert pitch). In these reappearances of the quotation there resides a conflict between the tonal centers

and the open fifths ostinato that accompany the tune. This results in the familiarity of the tune being challenged by outside obstacles, and creates a strong sense of textural dissonance against the simple theme; and the listener hopes the melody will overcome this adversity at the conclusion. However, at the conclusion of the work, and at the final appearance of the quotation, the tune is moved from the soprano saxophone, the instrument that has always presented the quotation until now, and is taken over by the harmonica – a transformation that suggests some symbolic reference.

The (tonal) tune *Amazing Grace*, as it first appears in the work, is a token of simplicity and innocence. It appears in the midst of a strange environment of exotic textures and dissonant gestures. This musical language of exoticism, dissonance and conflict dominates the next several movements; the familiar face of *Amazing Grace* is absent. When the quotation appears in later form (i.e. at maturity) it is presented in direct confrontation with opposing elements of the surrounding environment that challenge its right to occupy musical space. As the quotation emerges, disappears, and re-emerges, a scenario of conflict between man and nature suggests itself. Finally, at the quotation’s last statement the melody is significantly transformed. Perhaps this transformation of the melody, as it moves from saxophone to harmonica, with the latter’s connections to the Blues and to folk music, suggests the death of a protagonist that we have glimpsed intermittently throughout the cycle followed perhaps by an experience of redemption or liberation, or even a journey into an afterlife.

This “death” seems to occur within the *Nocturnal* movement. It can be symbolically interpreted to take place at the first appearance of the quotation in this movement, at rehearsal number 33, after a lengthy introduction that revisits motives and gestures from previous movements (i.e. guitar ostinato from the *Refrains* played in the hammered dulcimer, and motivic
gestures from the saxophone in *Dark Paths* echoed now in the harp). Because the music is entirely different in character from the previous movements, and different from the movement’s opening musical atmosphere (in that they are dissonant in language, elusive in their pitch centers, and maintain an overall improvisational character by juxtaposing borrowed rhythms and grouplets), a symbolic event can be interpreted to have occurred. The stasis and ritual aura of this section also alludes to a ceremony reflecting on death.

The *Amazing Grace* that immediately appears after this (at rehearsal number 33) embraces the character of a lament – especially since it also contain a bass ostinato below it. The texture of the quotation in this appearance, and subsequent ones, can be seen as quasi-homophonic as the bass ostinato fifths provide a loose harmony to the quotation melody. The low range of the open fifths in the harp and contrabass also solemnly portrays a mood and aura of death. In fact, in Crumb’s *Songs, Drones, and Refrains of Death*, and in the third movement of his *Madrigals, Book IV*, the contrabass drone of a perfect fourth is connected with the idea of death. The quotations that appear starting here can also be symbolically associated with the representation of death as Crumb indicates “white tone” and “senza vibrato” in the performing of the melody’s phrases by the soprano saxophone – and later in the harmonica; this is a performance indication that was not included in the quotation phrases that appeared previously in the *Dark Paths* movement. And, it is also interesting to note that except for the soprano saxophone, and an occasional bowed contrabass, every instrument used in the work has a sustaining quality. The sounds from these instruments (harp, guitar, vibraphone, hammered dulcimer, pizzicato contrabass and unpitched percussion instruments) naturally have a tendency to sustain and resonate after initiation if they are not immediately stopped. Associating these

---

58 Thomas Raymond De Dobay, “Harmonic Materials and Usages in the Lorca Cycle” (PhD., diss., University of Southern California, 1982), 143.
sustains, and their longing quality with the concept of fading death and distance provides further strength to the conclusions formed here.

The contrasting sections to the *Amazing Grace* (seen in Example 4.9) in this movement (rehearsal numbers 35 through 36, and through 41) are labeled as “quasi-Serenata” by the composer. With metered notation and the use of a steady eighth-notes rhythm, these sections give the movement a steady pulse. The alternation between the guitar gestures and the harp/hammered dulcimer figures also resembles a “call and response” effect which is often associated with religious rituals and services. These sections also seem more like an accompaniment to a theme or melody, and because of the omission of a clear melody or theme, these are not exactly true serenades (hence Crumb’s label “quasi-Serenata”). *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* describes the Baroque term “serenata” as a musical performance held in someone’s honor, and performed in the evening, and this finds strong connection to the concepts explored here.\(^{59}\) If the *Amazing Grace* quotations (or perhaps the saxophone instrument) in this movement are considered to be a type of entity – one that eventually goes through a testing journey through obstacles and outside forces before transcending towards a higher goal, then the these contrasting “quasi-Serenata” sections can be considered a serenade, or homage, to the quotation – and ultimately to the concept of death.

The hymn text to *Amazing Grace* closely associates the tune with the idea of enlightenment, divine grace, and eternal salvation and redemption in the afterlife. The hymn is frequently featured at funerals and memorial services. In modern times, *Amazing Grace* is commonly performed on bagpipes, which have been a fixture of Scottish and Irish music, since the 12\(^{th}\) century. In Celtic tradition, bagpipes are commonly used to play a lament at services of

remembrance, and today they remain popular in Scotland, Ireland, and various British Commonwealth countries. Numerous commercial recordings of *Amazing Grace* performed by solo or massed pipers are available and remain popular throughout the world. Perhaps by scoring *Amazing Grace* over an ostinato in open fifths is Crumb’s way of acknowledging this modern adaptation of the tune. Although the open fifth ostinato pattern, which outlines G pentatonic, is not exactly a stationary drone, the pattern’s long rhythmic values and short repeated pattern is evocative of a drone. The drone pipes of the Highland pipes are tuned in perfect fifths (on, or near, G and D); The *Amazing Grace* tune with underlying fifths in this movement of *Quest* evokes the texture of the bagpipes; the soprano saxophone (and later the harmonica) serves as the “chanter,” or melody pipe, while the harp and contrabass play the role of the drone pipes. Both the bagpipe and Crumb’s melodic “chanter” (saxophone/harmonica) are, of course, woodwind instruments, providing a further point of correspondence.

With this textural imitation of the bagpipe by the soprano saxophone, contrabass, and harp, the associations of the bagpipe with funerals and memorial services, and the symbolic interpretation of the *Amazing Grace* quotation narrative, one can easily conclude that Crumb is making references to the afterlife, a documented interest of his that he explored in works such as *Madrigals, Book II* (1965), *Songs, Drones, and Refrains of Death* (1968), *Madrigals - Book IV* (1969), and *Ancient Voices of Children* (1970) – a progressive and developing journey, or quest, that leads to mystical or spiritual redemption. This conclusion also seems to be somewhat confirmed, although stated elusively, if we revisit Crumb’s program notes about *Quest*:

---

The poetic basis for *Quest* was never very clearly articulated in my thinking. I recall pondering images such as the famous incipit of Dante's *Inferno* ("In the midway of this our mortal life, I found me in a gloomy mood, astray ...") and a line from Lorca ("The dark paths of the guitar"); also the concept of a "quest" as a long tortuous journey towards an ecstatic and transfigured feeling of "arrival" became associated with certain musical ideas during the sketching process.  

The reference to *Inferno* also supports this conclusion as Dante’s overall story deals with a religious pilgrimage to find God – while passing through Hell, Purgatory, and finally Paradise.

The intervallic components of the *Amazing Grace* tune, how it is connected to the Quest motive, and its relationship to the tuning of the guitar, perfectly complement the overall connection of musical elements in the work; indeed, the *Amazing Grace* quotation is the central idea that generates the entire composition.

This use of quotation by Crumb is similar to what J. Peter Burkholder, referring to the music of Charles Ives, calls “cumulative setting.” He describes “cumulative setting” as a thematic form in which the theme, usually a borrowed or paraphrased tune, appears complete only near the end of the movement and is anticipated by development of motives from the theme, fragments or paraphrases of the theme.

This term describes Ives’ use of quotation in his music appropriately; the way in which Crumb uses quotation in *Quest* is clearly different, but related. *Quest*, represents a kind of “de-cumulative setting” in which a more or less complete setting of a quoted melody is progressively fragmented until only a poignant memory of its original shape and structure remain.

---

62 Crumb, *Quest*, 2.
64 Ibid., 855.
V. CONCLUSION

In Quest, Crumb explores one of the most unique aspects of the guitar’s design, namely the standard tuning of the open strings. The guitar, therefore, plays a formative role as a primary source of musical material in Quest. The other primary source, the hymn tune Amazing Grace, as a quotation is a melody that has a strong congruence with the intervals of the guitar’s open strings. The combination of these two elements, along with certain octatonic formations that also derive, ultimately, from the standard tuning of the guitar, creates a musical whole with considerable metaphorical and poetic resonance. The very title of the piece suggests a work that enacts the linked concepts of journey, transformation, redemption and arrival.

On the surface, Quest seems to embody a simple intuitive process – the use of pentatonic, octatonic, and other mutually opposed musical concepts to create a collage-like effect. We have seen, however, that the work is unified by the generation of many of the materials of the work from a basic motive. This network of motivic relationships is further strengthened by the use of a musical quotation that is closely connected to it, namely the melody Amazing Grace, which, as we have seen, is connected to the basic Quest motive through their common congruence the standard tuning of the guitar. Such a simple concept that generates a complex web of unified elements demonstrates the elegance of Crumb’s technique and musical style in Quest.
REFERENCES


Cooper, C. “Mirroring the innermost recesses (David Starobin talks about his collaboration with George Crumb).” Classical Guitar, 18 (Dec 1999): 11-12.


September 28, 2007

John Crabtree

Dear Mr. Crabtree,

Thank you for your e-mail correspondence in which you have requested permission to include excerpts from George Crumb's *QUEST* in your dissertation.

We are pleased to grant you this permission, gratis. In your acknowledgements you must include the copyright dates and the credit notice, *Used by permission of C.F. Peters Corporation*.

Our permission to reprint extends only to University Microfilms International to distribute copies of your dissertation upon request.

With all best wishes for success with your dissertation, I am

Sincerely,

C.F. PETERS CORPORATION

Héctor Colón
Rights and Editorial Department
VITA

Originally from New Orleans, Louisiana, John Crabtree received his Bachelor of Music degree in guitar performance from Southeastern Louisiana University in 1996 and his Master of Music degree in composition from Louisiana State University in 1999. Crabtree’s compositions have been performed nationally and internationally at various concerts and conferences in North America, Europe, and South America. Among his awards are the Phi Mu Alpha National Conference Centennial Fanfare Competition of 1997 for *A Centennial Celebration: Sinfonian Fanfare* for brass ensemble, New York’s INMC (International New Music Consortium, Inc.) Composition Competition of 2001 for *Scintillate Plectrums* for electronic tape, a series of consecutive Standard Awards from ASCAP. His *Commencement* for trombone choir recently won one of two prizes in the Penn State University College of Arts and Architecture’s Competition for Two Commencement Marches for the Penn State University Trombone Choir. Several of his works can be heard on the *Magni, New Tertian Recordings*, and *Summit* labels. Crabtree has previously served on the music faculty at Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond, Louisiana, Our Lady of the Lake College in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and the University of Houston, in Houston, Texas. He is currently among the music faculty at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas, where he teaches music theory, musicianship, composition, and electronic music.