

## Music for a Summer Evening (Makrokosmos III)

### programme notes in CD booklet, Elektra Nonesuch 9-79149-2

**Music for a Summer Evening (Makrokosmos III)**, for two amplified pianos and percussion, was completed in February 1974. The work was commissioned by the Fromm Foundation and was written specifically for (and is dedicated to) Gilbert Kalish, James Freeman, Raymond DesRoches, and Richard Fitz. These four gifted performers premiered the work at Swarthmore College on March 30, 1974.

The combination of two pianos and percussion instruments was, of course, first formulated by Béla Bartók in his Sonata of 1937, and it is curious that other composers did not subsequently contribute to the genre. Bartók was one of the very first composers to write truly expressive passages for the percussion instruments; since those days there has been a veritable revolution in percussion technique and idiom and new music has inevitably assimilated these developments. The battery of percussion instruments required for **Summer Evening** is extensive and includes vibraphone, xylophone, glockenspiel, tubular bells, crotales (antique cymbals), bell tree, claves, maracas, sleighbells, wood blocks and temple blocks, triangles, and several varieties of drums, tam-tams, and cymbals. Certain rather exotic (and in some cases, quite ancient) instruments are occasionally employed for their special timbral characteristics, for example: two slide-whistles (in "Wanderer-Fantasy"); a metal thunder-sheet (in "The Advent"); African log drum, quijada del asino (jawbone of an ass), sistrum, Tibetan prayer stones, musical jug, alto recorder, and, in "Myth", African thumb piano and guiro (played by the pianists). Some of the more ethereal sounds of **Summer Evening** are produced by drawing a contrabass bow over tam-tams, crotales, and vibraphone plates. This kaleidoscopic range of percussion timbre is integrated with a great variety of special sounds produced by the pianists. In "Music of the Starry Night", for example, the piano strings are covered with sheets of paper, thereby producing a rather surrealistic distortion of the piano tone when the keys are struck.

As in several of my other works, the musical fabric of **Summer Evening** results largely from the elaboration of tiny cells into a sort of mosaic design. This time-hallowed technique seems to function in much new music, irrespective of style, as a primary structural *modus*. In its overall style, **Summer Evening** might be described as either more or less atonal, or more or less tonal. The more overtly tonal passages can be defined in terms of the basic polarity F#-D# minor (or, enharmonically, Gb-Eb minor). This (most traditional) polarity is twice stated in "The Advent" -- in the opening crescendo passages ("majestic, like a larger rhythm of nature"), and in the concluding "Hymn for the Nativity of the Star-Child". It is stated once again in "Music of the Starry Night", with the quotation of passages from Bach's D# minor fugue (*Well-tempered Clavier*, Book II) and a concluding "Song of Reconciliation" in Gb (overlaid by an intermittently resounding "Fivefold Galactic Bells" in F#). One other structural device which the astute listener may perceive is the isorhythmic construction of "Myth", which consists of simultaneously performed taleas of 13, 7, and 11 bars.

I feel that **Summer Evening** projects a clearly articulated large expressive curve over its approximately 40-minute duration. The first, third, and fifth movements, which are scored for the full ensemble of instruments and laid out on a large scale, would seem to define the primary import of the work (which might be interpreted as a kind of "cosmic drama"). On the other hand, "Wanderer Fantasy" (mostly for the two pianos alone) and the somewhat atavistic "Myth" (for percussion instruments) were conceived

of as dream-like pieces functioning as intermezzos within the overall sequence of movements.

The three larger movements carry poetic quotations which were very much in my thoughts during the sketching-out process, and which, I believe, find their symbolic resonance in the sounds of **Summer Evening**. "Nocturnal Sounds" is inscribed with an excerpt from Quasimodo: *"Odo risonanze effimere, oblio di piena notte nell'acqua stellata"* ("I hear ephemeral echoes, oblivion of full night in the starred water"); "The Advent" is associated with a passage from Pascal: *"Le silence éternel des espaces infinis m'effraie"* ("The eternal silence of infinite space terrifies me"); and the last movement, "Music of the Starry Night", cites these transcendently beautiful images of Rilke: *"Und in den Nächten fällt die schwere Erde aus allen Sternen in die Einsamkeit. Wir alle fallen. Und doch ist Einer, welcher dieses Fallen unendlich sanft in seinen Händen hält"* ("And in the nights the heavy earth is falling from all the stars down into loneliness. We are all falling. And yet there is One who holds this falling endlessly gently in His hands.")

In closing, I feel that it would be most appropriate to emphasize the critically important role of the performer in the evolution of any new musical language. New music, with its enormous technical and expressive demands, depends for its very existence on a type of pioneer performer, who, in fact, is engaged in creating and codifying the *Aufführungspraxis* of our own time. The number of such dedicated performers is perhaps not large; fortunately, however, they do exist, and I have enjoyed my collaboration with four of them in this recording of **Music for a Summer Evening**. Their efforts were tireless, their artistic purpose single-minded and uncompromising. For this I am most grateful.

**George Crumb**