

# Music@Menlo *LIVE*

## 1 Maps and Legends

Music@Menlo's eighth season, *Maps and Legends*, explored a wide compass of times, places, and universal phenomena. The season's offerings ranged from programs that celebrated a nation's identity to music composed in response to the changing of the seasons and the trauma of war. The 2010 edition of Music@Menlo *LIVE* chronicles this fascinating journey, preserving for listeners the exceptional performances that made *Maps and Legends* such a memorable experience.

Disc 1 captures the magic of 2010's opening-night program. The distinct interpretations of four virtuoso soloists combined for a uniquely dynamic reading of *The Four Seasons* of Antonio Vivaldi. In one of the festival's most delightfully unorthodox turns, this perennially beloved Baroque masterpiece prefaced George Crumb's *Music for a Summer Evening*, a mesmerizing soundscape for two amplified pianos and percussion composed more than 250 years later.

### **ANTONIO VIVALDI (1678–1741): *The Four Seasons* (1723)**

Antonio Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* makes a strong case as the Western canon's most universally familiar music. Such widespread popularity is a double-edged sword: *The Four Seasons*'s ubiquity in popular culture has too often presented as harmless background music a fiendishly inventive work by a composer of terrific originality.

The concertos that make up *The Four Seasons* (*Le quattro stagioni*) appeared as the first four of twelve violin concertos published as *Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'inventione* (*The Contest between Harmony and Invention*), op. 8. Vivaldi composed them to accompany a



Inon Barnatan, piano; Ani Kavafian, violin; Joshua Gindele, cello

set of four sonnets—"La primavera," "L'estate," "L'autunno," and "L'inverno"—whose authorship is uncertain but generally attributed to Vivaldi himself. The sonnets' tripartite structures align with the three movements of each concerto, which in turn provide vivid musical depictions of the corresponding text.

*The Four Seasons* evinces Vivaldi's importance to the development of the Baroque concerto. His contributions to the genre, which total more than five hundred, defined the concerto form as a dialogue between soloist and ensemble and established certain formal

characteristics as standards in concerto writing. (They also established the concerto as a vehicle for instrumental virtuosity—fittingly so, given Vivaldi’s stature as one of the finest violinists of his generation; more than two hundred of Vivaldi’s concertos are for violin.) Vivaldi’s concertos served as significant models for no less than Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Brandenburg* Concertos, among other major works of the Baroque period.

But of equal importance to the formal innovations manifested in works like *The Four Seasons* are the breadth of their dramatic character and the extent of Vivaldi’s vision in imagining the expressive potential of the concerto form. *The Four Seasons* concertos are remarkable for their vivid illustration of the sonnets that accompany them, whether in depicting hunting horns and guns in “Autumn” or in the chilling texture of “Winter,” mimetic of the “cold in the icy snow/In the harsh breath of a horrid wind.”

—Patrick Castillo

**GEORGE CRUMB** (b. 1929): *Music for a Summer Evening* (*Makrokosmos III*) (1974)

*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, sleigh bells, 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*), 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-sharp-d-sharp minor (or, enharmonically, g-flat-e-flat 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-sharp minor fugue (*The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book II), and a concluding “Song of Reconciliation” in G-flat (overlaid by an intermittently resounding “Fivefold Galactic Bells” in F-sharp). One other structural device which the astute listener may perceive is the isorhythmic construction of *Myth*, which consists of simultaneously performed taleas of thirteen, seven, and eleven bars.

I feel that *Summer Evening* projects a clearly articulated large expressive curve over its approximately forty-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 halt*” (“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”).

—George Crumb, excerpted from the liner notes to *George Crumb: Music for a Summer Evening* (Bridge Records, Inc.), reprinted with kind permission from Bridge Records, Inc., and George Crumb



## About Music@Menlo

Music@Menlo is an internationally acclaimed three-week summer festival and institute that combines world-class chamber music performances, extensive audience engagement with artists, intensive training for preprofessional musicians, and efforts to enhance and broaden the chamber music community of the San Francisco Bay Area. An immersive and engaging experience centered around a distinctive array of programming, Music@Menlo enriches its core concert programs with numerous opportunities for in-depth learning to intensify audiences’ enjoyment and understanding of the music and provide meaningful ways for aficionados and newcomers of all ages to explore classical chamber music.