GEORGE CRUMB

EINE KLEINE MITTERNACHTMUSIK
(A Little Midnight Music)

for Amplified Piano

Program Note

I have long been an admirer of Thelonious Monk's famous Jazz melody 'Round Midnight. Monk's tune was also a favorite of the Italian pianist Emanuele Arciuli and he conceived the idea of commissioning several composers to write a short piano piece containing some reference to it. I was immediately attracted to the idea of an homage to Monk but found my conception expanding to include a whole suite of short pieces. The result was *Eine Kleine Mitternachtmusik* ("A Little Midnight Music"), completed in 2001, and subsequently premiered and recorded by Mr. Arciuli.

In the beginning and concluding movements of my suite I quote entire phrases of Monk's theme (while retaining his dark e-flat minor tonality and his exquisite and almost Debussyesque harmonic colorations) and the listener will also recognize isolated melodic fragments of the tune at various other points in my score. As a compliment to Monk's world I have evoked two immediately recognizable genres of American popular music - "ragtime" and "blues." In the piece entitled "Golliwog Revisited" I offer a kind of surrealistic parody of Debussy's "Golliwog's Cakewalk" (from his *Children's Corner*). I even include Debussy's mordantly saccharine reference to Wagner's *Tristan* (which gave me the eerie sense of "quoting a quotation"), and for good measure throw in a motif from *Till Eulenspiegel!* My little piece in "blues" style, with the borrowed title "Blues in the Night," is an attempt to fuse that idiom with my own harmonic language.

Towards the end of my *Mitternachtmusik* suite the pianist is required to ring in the midnight hour by chanting the Italian numerals one through twelve, accompanied by the ringing, bell-like sonorities of the piano. Then a mysteriously and portentously uttered *mezzanotte* ("midnight") prefaces the final reference to Monk's melody.

The style of piano writing in *Eine Kleine Mitternachtmusik* utilizes (as in all of my earlier piano works) the resources of the "extended piano." The use of pizzicato effects, glissandos, muted tones, production of harmonics, and even in several passages, striking the metal structural beams of the piano with a percussionist's beater, greatly enlarges the coloristic possibilities of the instrument.

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Suggested Program Listing

Eine Kleine Mitternachtmusik (A Little Midnight Music)
(Ruminations on *'Round Midnight* by Thelonious Monk)

1. Nocturnal Theme
2. Charade
3. Premonition
4. Cobweb and Peaseblossom (Scherzo)
5. Incantation
6. Golliwog Revisited
7. Blues in the Night
8. Cadenza with Tolling Bells
9. Midnight Transformation

Performance Notes

1) All notes are preceded by an accidental, except in case(s) of a repetition of pitch or pattern of pitches. The passages with a key signature (in the Monk theme) are read in the traditional manner.
2) All metronome indications are approximate and may vary slightly, depending on the acoustical properties of the hall, etc. For a more brilliant and scintillating effect, the second piece ("Charade") may be played at a considerably faster tempo than indicated, if desired (say up to about MM. 66 for the quarter note).
3) *Eine Kleine Mitternachtmusik* requires several special extended techniques such as *pizzicato* playing, muted tones, production of harmonics, etc. In order that the execution of these effects be accurate, it is important that the strings be clearly marked in some manner. Some pianists prefer to mark only those strings that correspond to the black keys, thereby replicating a sense of "keyboard" inside the piano.
4) The pianist will need a percussionist's medium hard yarn stick for playing on the metal crossbeams of the piano. The choice of crossbeams is left to the pianist; successive passages might be played on different beams for a variety of timbre.
5) The performer should distinguish carefully between f.t. (with the fingertip) and f.n. (with the fingernail).
6) The pedal instructions are precise and should be followed exactly. The following special symbols are used: Ped. I = right (damper) pedal; Ped. II = middle (sostenuto) pedal; Ped. III = left (una corda) pedal. Ped. I sempre = keep damper pedal depressed throughout (let sounds vibrate through pauses). N.B. The pianist must ascertain that the sostenuto pedal functions correctly since many special effects in the score depend on this pedal.
7) A conventional microphone (suspended over the bass strings) should be used for the amplification of the piano. The level of amplification should be set rather high so that the loudest passages are quite powerful in effect. The level should not be adjusted during the performance.
8) The shouted (or spoken, or whispered) Italian words (in "Cadenza with Tolling Bells") should project clearly to the audience! If the performer prefers, these words may be translated into another language.
9) The difficult technique of producing harmonics by the left hand alone (in "Blues in the Night", bars 4, 6, 15, and 16) should be studied very carefully so that the harmonic projects clearly and with the proper intonation. The thumb (on the harmonic node) should come off the string immediately after the string is scraped (by the forefinger) so that the harmonics ring out with a more beautiful resonance. I have found that on some pianos this effect in bar 6 is problematical since the harmonic node is concealed by the piano's beamwork. A possible substitute for this 5th partial harmonic would be to take a higher partial on a lower string that will produce the identical pitch. The nodes for these very high partials are found on the near side of the dampers (nearest the player). For example, to produce the required sounding pitch F# (as in bar 6), touch the lowest C# string very near the damper (on player's side of damper) with the third finger and scrape the string with the second finger.

10)

$\left(\begin{smallmatrix}♩\\3\end{smallmatrix}\right)$ = 3 seconds (approximately) $\left(\begin{smallmatrix}♩\\5\end{smallmatrix}\right)$ = 5 seconds (approximately)

.o. = o♩   ‡ = ♩♯ (etc.)

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Ruminations on *'Round Midnight* by Thelonious Monk
for Amplified Piano

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1. Nocturnal Theme
Tema - poco adagio, esitante (♩ = ca. 50)

2. Charade più mosso; scorrevole, prismatico (♩ = ca. 56)

3. Premonition
Misterioso, molto lento (♩ = ca. 50)

4. Cobweb and Peaseblossom (Scherzo)

5. Incantation
Slowly and dramatically (♪ = ca. 70)

6. Golliwog Revisited
Cakewalk tempo; jauntily, capriciously, grotesque (♩ = ca. 100)

*Depress all keys from low A♮ to D♯ (N.B. no pitches above the D♯ should be secured with the sostenuto pedal!).

7. Blues in the Night Molto languido (♪ = ca. 56) ("At sixes and sevens")

*) The grace notes in this piece should be played in a "lazy" manner (i.e. not too quickly).

8. Cadenza with Tolling Bells

Very free (♩ = ca. 50)

("...the advent of midnight")

9. Midnight Transformation
Tema – a slow ballad tempo, languidly (♩ = ca. 50)

Ancora più lento
(♩ = ca. 44)

❋ The vocal dynamic should follow the overall diminuendo, i.e. begin with shouting and progress gradually to a stage whisper.

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