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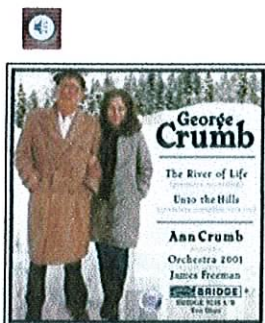
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Review

by [Uncle Dave Lewis](#)

Bridge Records' Complete Crumb Edition, Vol. 10, highlights pre-eminent American composer George Crumb in a remarkable collaboration in the "family way" – with his daughter, soprano Ann Crumb, as featured soloist in two song cycles: *The River of Life* (2003) and *Unto the Hills* (2002). Both of these cycles are part of a larger project (American Songbook), to which Crumb has contributed four cycles, in which traditional American song texts are subjected to Crumb's uniquely spectral and mystical musical treatments. Although *Bridge* previously released *Unto the Hills* with Ann Crumb on Volume 7 of this series, it represented a formative version of the cycle containing only eight pieces; now there are nine and various small details are added in some of the other pieces as well.

Ann Crumb is a well-known Tony Award-nominated singer and actress who works most often in Broadway shows and has appeared on an episode of *Law and Order* or two. She sings her father's settings in a light, pop voice more readily associated with the Broadway stage than with the "green umbrella"-type new music recitals where Crumb's music is heard most frequently. Nothing against Lucy Shelton or the late, great Jan de Gaetani (who premiered Crumb's *Ancient Voices of Children*), but Ann Crumb's light and flexible voice seems to work best for this music, particularly in these settings given the familiar American, and specifically Appalachian, milieu of the texts. Sometimes Crumb requires Ann Crumb to hum passages of the music, or to break out of the familiar pattern of the melody and repeat fragments of phrases, which she does as though it's second nature. That's an uncommon skill set for a pop voice; Charles Ives would have been jealous.

George Crumb is turning back to his West Virginia roots in these cycles. While some listeners, unable to divorce these tunes from their original traditional context, might find Crumb's re-interpretations of them too bizarre, others may well find the traditional elements just familiar enough to relate to Crumb's music in a way that they have not been able to in the past. Crumb's musical settings are scored for percussionists and piano and the instrumentalists are drawn from the ranks of *Orchestra 2001* and led by James Freeman; the percussion playing is crisp and taut, yet nonchalant in the manner that Crumb seems to intend. *Bridge's* recording is clear, warm, and responsive and succeeds in having the best of both worlds, expansively spatial while intimate when it needs to be. Although recorded at Lang Concert Hall in Swarthmore, PA, sometimes Ann Crumb sounds like she is singing in an old country church – just the right ambience.

Featured Artist

[Ann Crumb](#)

Performance **Sound**
★★★★★ ★★★★★

Release Date **Time**
2007 82:59

Label
Bridge[9218]

Album Information
Libretto/lyrics included with the album

Genre
Vocal

AMG Album ID
W 151552

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