George Rochberg’s *Ukiyo-e (Pictures of the Floating World)*

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by

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ABSTRACT

GEORGE ROCHBERG’S UKIYO-E (PICTURES OF THE FLOATING WORLD)

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This thesis was written in preparation for a lecture recital of George Rochberg’s 1973 composition for solo harp, *Ukiyo-e (Pictures of the Floating World)*. Research was conducted in three streams: a study of the historical context in which the work was composed, an original structural analysis of the composition, and an exploration of the composition’s relationship with the ukiyo-e Japanese art genre. Research of the historical context considered both George Rochberg’s life and writings, drawing from both primary and secondary sources to discern the effect his life’s events had on this particular composition. Particular attention is paid to Rochberg’s reaction to the 1964 death of his son and his subsequent rejection of serialism in favor of his self-coined “new romanticism.” The structural analysis is two-fold: A timbral motivic analysis reveals a three-part structure organized by a recurring timbral motive, while analysis of the pitch organization reveals a binary structure based on two pitch collections, an octatonic collection and a heptatonic non-diatomic mode. As very little research on this composition exists, this thesis poses a great deal of significance for both harpists and music theorists.
George Rochberg’s *Ukiyo-e (Pictures of the Floating World)*

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Table of Contents

Biography of George Rochberg ................................................................. 1

Timbral Analysis .......................................................................................... 6

Pitch Collections ......................................................................................... 15

Pitch organization ......................................................................................... 18

Ukiyo-e: the wood-block printing technique .............................................. 20

Ukiyo-e: The floating world expressed through music ................................ 24

Ukiyo-e: The use of color ........................................................................... 26

Ukiyo-e: Landscape ..................................................................................... 27

Ukiyo-e: Japanese idioms in the music ......................................................... 28

Rochberg’s “New Romanticism” .................................................................. 30

Rochberg’s Hypothesis of Music ................................................................. 32

Premiere and Reaction ................................................................................. 35

Conclusion .................................................................................................. 37

Bibliography ............................................................................................... 38

Appendix A: Lecture Recital ....................................................................... 40

Appendix B: Quotes from George Rochberg ............................................. 41

Appendix C: Newspaper Clippings ............................................................. 42
List of Figures

Figure 1, Scalar Motive
Figure 2, Repeated-note Motive
Figure 3, Harmonics Motive
Figure 4, Nail Motive
Figure 5, Melodic Motive
Figure 6, PDLT Motive
Figure 7, Modified Harmonics Motive
Figure 8, Grace-note Motive
Figure 9, Cadenza Excerpt
Figure 10, Arpeggio Motive
Figure 11, Buzzing Motive
Figure 12, Timbral Flowchart
Figure 13, Octatonic Collection
Figure 14, Heptatonic Mode
Figure 15, Pitch Organization
Figure 16, Wood-block Printing Process
Figure 17, Signatures on Ukiyo-e Prints
Figure 18, Hokusai’s “Under the Wave of Kanagawa”
Figure 19, Hiroshige’s “One Hundred Views of Famous Places in Edo: Squall at Ohashi
Figure 20, Hokusai’s “The Kirifuri Waterfall”
Figure 21, Koto
Figure 22, Shamisen
Preface

As musicians, we are bestowed a great deal of responsibility by the composers of the music we perform. The composers trust us to accurately and thoughtfully realize their compositions, reflecting the composers’ intentions, expressions, and ideals through our performances. This responsibility is sometimes overwhelming, especially when performing music that is challenging to understand, such as many twentieth-century compositions. Through this project, I was able to better grasp George Rochberg’s compositional intent by understanding *Ukiyo-e (Pictures of the Floating World)* through intense and in-depth research of Rochberg’s life and ideas, ukiyo-e art, and the form and structure of the composition. Through this journey, Rochberg’s vision for this piece gradually revealed itself to me, and I can now present a more accurate reflection of Rochberg’s vision in my performance. It is my hope that this thesis will provide greater insight for other harpists and will enhance many future performances of Rochberg’s *Ukiyo-e (Pictures of the Floating World)*.

Mary Dicken, 2006
Biography of George Rochberg

Like most people, George Rochberg was a product of both his educational training and the events in his life. His music can be seen to embody these two facets. Rochberg had a relatively late start in his compositional studies. In 1939, at age twenty-one, he began his formal music composition studies in New York City at the Mannes College of Music, where he studied with Hans Weisse, George Szell, and Leopold Mannes. Similar to many Americans of his generation, World War II service disrupted his studies in 1942. After sustaining battle injuries in Normandy, Rochberg returned to the United States in 1945. Rochberg resumed his compositional studies with Rosario Scalero and Gian Carlo Menotti at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. He later earned his Master’s degree from the University of Pennsylvania and returned to teach at Curtis until 1954. Like many twentieth-century composers, Rochberg’s compositions can be divided into three periods, the first of which centers around his studies in Philadelphia. During this early period, Rochberg’s compositions were largely influenced by the works of Stravinsky, Hindemith, and Bartók. While fully embracing dissonance, these compositions did not yet venture into the serial style that characterized his later works.

The first major turning point for Rochberg’s compositional style occurred in 1950 when he was granted a Fulbright fellowship to study with the Italian serialist composer Luigi Dallapiccola at the American Academy in Rome. Through this relationship, Rochberg was strongly impressed by dodecaphony, and, as a result, his compositions

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during the 1950s were largely directed by Schoenbergian serialism. At the time, he believed serialism was the ultimate direction of musical language and viewed Schoenberg as the master. In his 1955 essay, “Tradition and Twelve-tone Music,” Rochberg lauded Schoenberg as “a supreme artist and equally supreme thinker-in-tones who opened a new world…so vast that he could not in a single lifetime possibly complete the work that is still to be done by our generation and the next.” In the late 1950s, Rochberg became increasingly influenced by Webern and, accordingly, continued his exploration and refinement of serialist compositional techniques.

Rochberg’s affinity for serialism was certainly tied to his experience in World War II. In a 1986 interview with Richard Dufallo, Rochberg said:

One of the most powerful impulses toward twelve-tone, serialism, whatever you want to call it, was my reaction to my war experience which began to take over after the war….After the war, after I began to feel I had my feet on the ground musically, and in other ways too, the drama, the darkness of that whole experience…really had rooted itself. It didn’t show itself right away, but it started to make demands on me emotionally. And that’s what started to push me into a kind of atonal world….It came out of a deep emotional need to express what I felt had happened, what I’d been involved in and what it meant to me.

Rochberg’s late compositional period, spanning from 1964 to his recent death in May 2005 at age eighty-six, was largely a reaction to the second major turning point of his life – the 1964 death of his twenty-year-old son, Paul. Nearly twenty years later, Rochberg reflected on the tragedy, saying, “After Paul died, that absolutely made it necessary for me to wash my hands of the whole thing [serialism].” This tragedy caused

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5 Clarkson and Johnson.
Rochberg to abandon serialism as he found the technique too constricting in emotional expression, empty and meaningless.\(^6\)

As early as 1963, Rochberg was grappling with the question of twentieth-century music. In his essay entitled “In Search of Music,” he wrote:

> Something strange has happened to music – so strange, in fact, that I hardly know how to describe it. Up until the time of World War II, composers wrote music out of the conviction that somehow, in some mysterious fashion, music could and did express profound human states and emotions….And this is the strange thing that has happened: by applying the scientific attitude and ideology to the art of music, the composer has transformed music into a unique, if curious, form of applied science.

Eventually, Rochberg even found fault with his once-idolized paragon of composition, Arnold Schoenberg, suggesting in 1972 that Schoenberg “became too self-conscious about the historical value of his work and…he had given up the precious gift of his ear in favor of decisions which had little to do, ultimately, with his ear.\(^7\)”

During this late period, Rochberg’s compositions departed from serialism in favor of a mix of abstract chromaticism with traditional tonal idioms. In these compositions, Rochberg also extensively quoted other composers, such as Boulez, Berio, Varèse, Ives, Beethoven, and Mahler.\(^8\) The compositions from this period can be said to reflect Rochberg’s fully developed, mature compositional voice. It is this voice that is found in *Ukiyo-e (Pictures of a Floating World)*. Composed in 1973, this piece still speaks to us

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\(^7\) George Rochberg, “Reflections on Schoenberg,” *Perspectives of New Music* 11, no. 2. (Spring-Summer, 1973): 56-83.

today as a contemporary utterance and provides us a glimpse into the mind of one of the most significant composers of the twentieth century.

_Ukiyo-e (Pictures of a Floating World)_ was commissioned by the native Philadelphian harpist Marcella De Cray and was premiered by De Cray in 1975. At the time of the commissioning, De Cray had recently resigned from her position as principal harpist with the Philadelphia Orchestra and planned to move to San Francisco. Her decision to commission a new work for solo harp stemmed largely out of frustration with the lack of composers writing for the harp and a desire to expand the instrument’s slim concert repertoire. Through her tenure with the Philadelphia Orchestra, De Cray encountered Rochberg as he worked with the orchestra. Although she never met him personally, De Cray was impressed by Rochberg’s compositions and approached him to compose a new harp composition. According to her recollection, her preparedness to persuade him was unnecessary as Rochberg was delighted to compose a new work even though he knew nothing about the harp and had never before written for the instrument.

_Ukiyo-e (Pictures of the Floating World)_ was the first in a trio of works, all bearing the name _Ukiyo-e_. The second installment, _Slow Fires of Autumn (Ukiyo-e II)_ was composed in 1978-79. Written for flute and harp, this piece borrowed material from the first _Ukiyo-e_, prompting Rochberg to subtitle it _Ukiyo-e II_. The final composition in this trio came in 1983. Entitled _Between Two Worlds (Ukiyo-e III)_ , this work is scored for flute and piano.

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9 Marcella De Cray, interview by author, 31 March 2006, telephone.
Most of the scholarly research on Rochberg’s *Ukiyo-e* compositions centers on these two latter compositions. Very little research on the first *Ukiyo-e* has been published. This project hopes to remedy this paucity by examining the composition through structural analysis, through its relationship with the ukiyo-e art genre, and through the context in which it was composed.
Timbral Analysis

One way to organize *Ukiyo-e (Pictures of the Floating World)* is through timbral analysis. This composition employs many of the unique timbral effects for the harp that developed in the twentieth century, such as harmonics, plectral nail effects, Bartok “snap pizz.”, and notes played *pres de la table*. Rochberg chose these specific effects after Ms. De Cray referred him to Carlos Salzedo’s *Modern Study of the Harp*, an extremely influential harp reference book that explains the many effects and sonorities possible on the harp\(^\text{10}\). An examination of these timbral motives reveals a three-part form.

*Part I*

The opening motive, which I will refer to as the scalar motive, is a fluid scalar passage. Although it sounds similar to a glissando, the notes are individually articulated. This motive appears first at a forte dynamic and is then echoed pianississimo.

![Figure 1, Scalar Motive](image)

Next appears the repeated-note motive, a collection of pitches within the octatonic collection, each repeated twice. This motive uses rubato and sudden dynamic contrasts. The repeated-note motive is modified and repeated five times, each time separated by a small pause.

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\(^{10}\) De Cray.
The third motive introduced, the harmonics motive, is the composition’s recurring motive. In its first presentation, it begins with rolled chords spanning more than two octaves and is immediately followed by half-step harmonics, created by cutting the string in half with the left hand palm or right hand knuckle while plucking with the thumb. Again, rubato is employed. This motive appears three times in succession and is followed by a restatement of the scalar and repeated-note motives.

Figure 3, Harmonics Motive
Plectral nail effects define the next motive, the nail motive. The sound of a pick is imitated by plucking the string with the fingernail close to the soundboard. This motive also uses harmonics and traditionally plucked notes.

Figure 4, Nail Motive

The nail motive is followed by a return to the harmonics motive and, briefly, the repeated-note motive before it is restated, this time in an expanded form. To close the first part of the three-part form, the harmonics motive is referenced with rolled chords.

Part II

The second part of *Ukiyo-e* opens with a quasi-modal interruption. This motive, referred to as the melodic motive, is in the octatonic pitch collection but suggests a tonal center of C-sharp Phrygian. The melodic motive is characterized by a sustained melody above a rocking, triplet accompaniment. The harp’s enharmonic capabilities are exploited to produce a strong, resonant melody.
The next motive introduced, the p.d.l.t. motive, uses the *pres de la table* effect.

This effect calls for the strings to be plucked near the soundboard, producing a brassy, guitar-like tone, similar to the plectral nail effect in the nail motive.

The p.d.l.t motive is followed by a restatement of the melodic motive before the p.d.l.t. motive returns as an expanded statement in both of the composition’s pitch collections.

The melodic motive is then presented again, also in expanded form.

After a brief reference to the scalar motive, the harmonics motive reappears, this time modified as it does not begin with rolled chords and uses whole-step harmonic intervals instead of the previous statement in half-steps.
The second part of the three-part form is closed by the grace-note motive. This motive is characterized by an alternation between dry, secco, pianissimo chords preceded by grace notes and forte, rolled chords played close to the soundboard.

Cadenza

An aleatoric cadenza appears before the final section of the composition. The cadenza begins with a rubato, trill-like passage of indeterminate length. This pseudo-trill occurs three times. The third time ends with a dramatic, ascending whole-tone passage that appears underneath a set of specified pitches repeated in random order.
Following the trill-like passage are chords alternating between the composition’s two pitch collections. After the alternating chords, the cadenza ends dramatically with a noisy glissando that specifies the clanging of the wire bass strings and the Bartok “snap pizz.” This dramatic ending ranges in dynamic extremes.

Figure 9, Cadenza Excerpt

Part III

The final part of Ukiyo-e opens with the harmonics motive, presented in the modified form used in the second part of the composition. After three statements of varying length, this motive is followed by a return to the melodic motive and then a brief restatement of the harmonics motive. After this restatement and a brief glissando interlude, the grace note motive reappears. This time, the grace note motive uses the plectral nail effect of the nail motive and appears with reversed dynamics. The next motive, the arpeggio motive, opens with a rapid ascending arpeggio of stacked thirds, followed by descending whole-tone chords.
The arpeggio motive repeats once before the next motive, the buzzing motive, is introduced.

The buzzing motive is characterized by muted repeated tones on the enharmonic pitches F-sharp /G-flat and B-sharp/C-natural. This motive introduces another timbral effect created by holding the C pedal halfway between the sharp and natural positions so the string buzzes against the discs on the action plate when plucked. The buzzing motive is repeated many times with varying tempi and dynamics.

Finally, to close the third part of the composition and end the piece with a sort of coda, the harmonics motive returns. This presentation of the harmonics motive is
lengthier than previous statements of the motive and is expanded to include melodic references to the repeated-note and nail motives. The reappearance of the harmonics motive throughout the composition provides a thread of continuity to an otherwise through-composed work.
Figure 12, Timbral Flowchart
Pitch Collections

*Ukiyo-e* is based on two pitch collections, groupings of specific pitches that do not imply traditional western tonality. The entire piece is limited to these two collections, and all melodic material is drawn from them.

Octatonic Collection

The first collection is a modified octatonic scale. Octatonic scales are created by alternating half-steps and whole-steps. These scales are highly symmetric, both transpositionally and inversionally, and occur in only three distinct forms: [C C# D# E F# G A A#], [C# D E F G G# A# B], and [D D# F F# G# A B C]. Because of their symmetry, octatonic scales result in an extremely restricted and redundant subset structure consisting primarily of minor thirds, tritones, and diminished chords.

*Ukiyo-e* is based on an octatonic collection containing the pitches [C# D E F G G# A# B]. However, the octatonic collection used in *Ukiyo-e* is modified from the true octatonic scale, because it contains only seven notes and omits G-sharp. The explanation for this omission is simple: Double-action pedal harps are limited to seven note collections as a practicality. The pedal system requires that each pitch on the staff be confined to flat, natural, or sharp until the pedals are moved. This limitation means it is not possible to use both G-natural and G-sharp at the same time. The only way both pitches could be present is through the use of enharmonic A-flat, which is not possible since this octatonic scale requires A-sharp.
Kostka’s Heptatonic Mode B

The second collection used is a seven-note non-diatonic mode. Outside of the seven diatonic modes, all other seven-note scales, based solely on major and minor seconds, can be derived as modes of two seven-note scale systems. Stefan Kostka identified these two non-diatonic systems in his book *Materials and Techniques of Twentieth-Century Music*. The first is a major scale with raised fourth and lowered seventh scale degrees. The second is a major scale with raised fourth, raised fifth, and lowered seventh scale degrees. Seven modes can be extracted from each system, resulting in a total of fourteen non-diatonic seven-note scales.

In *Ukiyo-e*, Rochberg used Kostka’s second seven-note scale system. Specifically, he used the pitch collection containing the pitches [C# D E F# G# A# B#]. This pitch collection shares all but three pitches - F#, G#, and B# - with the octatonic collection. In practical terms, this overlap means only three pedal changes are necessary to transition between the collections.
Why?

Rochberg’s decision to limit the music to two pitch collections is unusual for a twentieth-century composition. As the twentieth century was marked by an exploration of non-traditional and extended chromaticism, much of the music composed during this time explores many scales, modes, and pitch collections. While Rochberg explores alternative modality in *Ukiyo-e*, there is clearly a practical reason to confine *Ukiyo-e* to two collections, since the harp is limited to a fixed set of seven pitches unless extensive pedal movement is employed. The use of only two collections also results in a static aesthetic of unmoving pitches, which raises the question of whether or not Rochberg made this decision for practical reasons, aesthetic reasons, or both. I would suggest Rochberg based his decision on both reasons. Aesthetically, the static pitch collections reinforce the ethos of ukiyo-e art, which will be explored later in this lecture, by musically creating a single moment in time.
Pitch organization

Since *Ukiyo-e* is limited to two pitch collections, it is easily possible to diagram the pitch organization of the composition. *Ukiyo-e* opens with the octatonic collection and remains in this collection through the entire first part of the three-part timbral structure. The next section opens with what sounds like C-sharp Phrygian but remains in the octatonic collection. In the next timbral motive – the p.d.l.t. motive – the heptatonic mode is introduced. As the music alternates between the two motives (the C-sharp Phrygian melodic motive and the p.d.l.t. motive) the pitch collections alternate accordingly. As the second part of the three-part timbral structure leads to the cadenza, new timbral motives are introduced and the alternations become more compressed. The cadenza is primarily in the heptatonic mode, though a series of four chords illustrates more rapid alternation between the two pitch collections before closing the cadenza firmly in the heptatonic mode. The final part of the timbral structure opens in the heptatonic mode, which is now the dominant pitch collection. However, the octatonic collection is briefly revisited throughout the beginning of this section. The coda found at the end of *Ukiyo-e*, which restates the harmonics motive, presents a summary of the work’s tonal structure as it begins in the octatonic collection and ends in the heptatonic mode.

Essentially, this work is binary in terms of pitch organization, though there is some overlap of the two collections. In the first section, which includes the music preceding the cadenza, the octatonic collection dominates. As the music moves closer to the cadenza, however, the heptatonic mode interjects with increasing frequency,
ultimately leading to a firm establishment of the heptatonic mode as the prevalent pitch collection after the cadenza. The coda reinforces this binary structure by summarizing the development from the octatonic collection to the heptatonic mode.

Figure 15, Pitch Organization
Ukiyo-e: the wood-block printing technique

In exploring the relationship between this composition’s structural and thematic ideas with the Japanese art genre, a link can be made between the motivic structure of the composition and the printing method employed in ukiyo-e art. The term ukiyo-e, translated to mean “pictures of the transient, unreliable world” or, more commonly, “pictures of the floating world”\textsuperscript{11},” refers to a Japanese art genre of woodblock prints prevalent in the Edo period (1615 – 1868). The ethos of ukiyo was first explained in the mid-seventeenth century novel by Asai Ryoi, \textit{Ukiyo monogatari (A Tale of the Floating World)}:

…Living only for the moment, turning our full attention to the pleasures of the moon, the snow, the cherry blossoms, and the maples, singing songs, drinking wine, and diverting ourselves just in floating, floating, caring not a whit for the poverty staring us in the face, refusing to be disheartened, like a gourd floating along with the river current: this is what we call the \textit{floating world}…

Ukiyo-e art came to be associated with hedonism – a preoccupation with the chic fashions, pursuits, and life styles of urban culture\textsuperscript{12}. This revolution in Japanese art emerged from the political and social unrest of the sixteenth century. Newly established feudal lords, who often rose from plebeian roots, were not cultured and educated in the Chinese philosophy, art, and literature of their predecessors. Their generous financial support of artists resulted in a new style of art that was much richer, bolder, and more magnificent than the subtle, monochrome art that preceded it. The paintings frequently depicted an often-glamorized everyday life, perhaps because of the rulers’ humble origins.

or their curiosity about peasant life. Popular subject matter included busy streets, Kabuki theater, and the courtesan-quarter, though later works favored landscapes and images of nature. Regardless of subject matter, ukiyo-e art depicted moments in time from an ever-transient, changing world. Perhaps it was this notion of a fleeting world that appealed to Rochberg, particularly after the premature death of his son.

One reason for ukiyo-e’s popularity was its novelty as an art form for the masses, rather than an elite luxury. Artists were able to offer ukiyo-e paintings in large quantities at reasonable prices because they were produced through woodblock printing. The process of woodblock printing involves separate woodblocks for each color used in the print. Each woodblock is used to add a layer of color to the scene until the scene is complete.

Figure 16, Wood-block Printing Process

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13 Lane.
14 Kobayashi, 60-61.
This concept of layered colors is expressed through Rochberg’s *Ukiyo-e*, as seen in the timbral motivic analysis. Each timbral motive can be considered a separate “color” in the composition. Since the work is essentially through-composed, new “colors” are constantly introduced. The result is a layering of colors that produces a final musical impression, just as the layering of colors in ukiyo-e prints results in a final artistic image.

Another connection between the woodblock-printing technique and Rochberg’s composition can be made regarding the role of the art’s creator. The artists who designed woodblock prints would create a sketch of their print and indicate the colors to be used, but the actual production was left up to other craftsmen, such as the woodblock carver and the printer. This involvement of many people in the woodblock printing process is evidenced by the multiple signatures that can be found on ukiyo-e prints.

Figure 17, Signatures on Ukiyo-e Prints
Similarly, Rochberg has indicated through his score the sketch of the composition (i.e. the pitches and rhythms) and the colors to be used (i.e. the notation of timbral effects and dynamics), but the actual product comes from the performer. In both instances, the artistic creator must trust others to accurately reproduce the work of art according to the directions given.
Ukiyo-e: The floating world expressed through music

The relationship between ukiyo-e art and music composition is not unique to Rochberg. Debussy’s early-twentieth century composition *La Mer* was inspired by the late ukiyo-e artist Katsushika Hokusai’s landscape print “Under the Wave of Kanagawa,” which is more commonly referred to as “The Great Wave.” The inspiration was so great that Debussy later chose the print to be the cover of his score.

Near the time of *Ukiyo-e’s* composition, in 1967, the collection of the artist Vera White and her husband Samuel was bequeathed to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. This collection contained over 300 objects, among which were Japanese ukiyo-e prints.

While it is purely speculative, it is indeed plausible that Rochberg encountered this collection since he was living in Philadelphia at the time, serving as the chair of the music department at the University of Pennsylvania. Regardless of his encounter with

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this particular collection, the addition to the Philadelphia Museum of Art demonstrates a public interest in ukiyo-e art. As a result, Rochberg’s decision to title the piece after the art genre was likely inspired by a personal encounter with ukiyo-e prints. Of his composition, Rochberg wrote:

The term *ukiyo-e* refers to a traditional school of Japanese painting whose great beauty and often piercing charm lies in its power to image the world not as static, fixed forms of “reality,” but as floating pictures of radiant qualities which range from states of forlornness and emptiness to quiet or ecstatic joy\(^\text{17}\).

Rochberg’s view of ukiyo-e emphasizes the dramatic range of emotions and expressions in the prints. His composition, like Debussy’s *La Mer*, certainly embodies these contrasts as it presents everything from the moments of inner quietude at the beginning and end of the work to the passionate turbulence found in the cadenza-like passage.

\(^{17}\) Dixon, 184.
Ukiyo-e: The use of color

Ukiyo-e prints are notable for their use of color. Although the prints generally use many colors, the colors used are often muted. Additionally, late ukiyo-e prints often have gradated colors, fading from light to dark or vice versa. These colors are reflected in Rochberg’s composition. On a whole, *Ukiyo-e (Pictures of the Floating World)* is a rather sedate composition, though there are some interjections of dynamic, explosive gestures throughout. The general calmness of this work is akin to the use of muted colors in ukiyo-e prints. Both are subtle expressions that create a graceful, postured image of a fleeting moment. Similarly, the composition imitates the gradated colors of late ukiyo-e prints by overlapping the timbral motives and pitch collections. The result is a continuous flow rather than distinct structural separations.

Figure 19, Hiroshige’s “One Hundred Views of Famous Places in Edo: Squall at Ohashi
Ukiyo-e: Landscape

While early ukiyo-e prints emphasized glamorous subjects, such as Kabuki actors, geishas, and samurai, late ukiyo-e prints tended to favor landscape images. In landscape prints, the landscape generally overwhelms any people depicted, emphasizing the greatness of nature and the insignificance of the humans who inhabit the world. While there is no record of which prints inspired Rochberg to compose *Ukiyo-e* (*Pictures of the Floating World*), I would suggest he was inspired by these later prints.

Musically, the composition evokes images of nature, especially water. For instance, the opening scalar passage suggests flowing water while the harmonics motive imitates the sound of raindrops. Additionally, Rochberg believed music stemmed from nature, writing:

The composer in search of music discovers that everything in nature (himself included) is in motion, that movement and rhythm are built into nature. In the composer, this awareness is translated into the shape of musical gestures. The composer in search of music discovers that everything in nature (himself included) sounds; everything has its sonic identity. In the composer, this awareness is transformed into the sounding substance he shapes into musical form and idea.\(^\text{18}\)

Rochberg’s writings on music and nature, coupled with the imagery in his composition, certainly support the notion that *Ukiyo-e* (*Pictures of the Floating World*) was inspired by the late ukiyo-e landscape prints.

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**Ukiyo-e: Japanese idioms in the music**

Another aspect of ukiyo-e art expressed through Rochberg’s composition is the Eastern-influence on the sounds he employs. Since ukiyo-e prints depicted everyday life in seventeenth through nineteenth century Japan, Rochberg may have sought to evoke aural images of this culture. His heavy reliance on heptatonic scales could be designed to evoke images of the Eastern world, though those scales are more likely associated with Balinese gamelon scales and Indian ragas than Japanese music. Static harmonies, such as those found in Rochberg’s *Ukiyo-e*, are also often associated with exoticism.¹⁹

The timbral effects in *Ukiyo-e* are imitative of the sounds made by several traditional Japanese instruments. For instance, the koto, a Japanese zither, is played by plucking the strings with a tsume, a type of plectrum.²⁰ Rochberg’s use of the plectral nail effect on the harp creates a similar sound to that of the koto.

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Another traditional Japanese instrument played with a plectrum, the shamisen, is a three-string fretless lute. Shamisen music is characterized by a constant buzzing sound created by the bass string, which is akin to the buzzing effect Rochberg employed in the buzzing motive. Additionally, shamisen players sometimes forgo the plectrum and pluck the instrument with the side of their fingers, creating a sound similar to the pres de la table effect found on the harp\textsuperscript{21}.

These Eastern sounds created by the non-Western scales and timbral effects Rochberg employs in \textit{Ukiyo-e} certainly speak of exoticism and, at least to the untrained ear of Western listeners, can evoke images of traditional Japanese culture and art.

Rochberg’s “New Romanticism”

In 1963, George Rochberg wrote, “It has taken me all these years to recognize and embrace the fact that at root I am a complete romantic and especially now that the question arises on all sides: after abstractionism, what next? The answer rings out clearly, the ‘new Romanticism.’” According to American musicologist Alexander Ringer, Rochberg’s self-coined “new Romanticism” was his conception that musical expression should outweigh intellectualism in his compositions. Ringer claims Rochberg was in the minority among his contemporaries with his artistic outlook, as many composers in the mid-twentieth century sought expression through academic compositional techniques.

The importance Rochberg placed on musical expression is certainly evident in his composition *Ukiyo-e (Pictures of the Floating World)*. This piece is very gestural. Rochberg seems to use musical gestures to evoke images and invite emotional responses. The rejection of serialism and the through-composed form of the piece illustrate his rejection of music academicism.

Rochberg’s respect for and incorporation of history also distinguish him from his peers. His music reflects the aesthetics of the many twentieth-century composers who preceded him – such as Bartok, Hindemith, Schoenberg, and Webern – and, in his late compositional period, he often directly quoted these influential composers.\(^2\)

Rochberg’s concept of “new Romanticism” extended beyond emotional expressionism. He desired to compose music that could act as an agent of social change,

\(^2\) Ringer.
art that could right a “world hopelessly off center.” In his critical essay, “The Avant-Garde and the Aesthetics of Survival,” Rochberg argued the avant-garde art of the early- and mid-twentieth century could not achieve social change because it was much more closely tied to science than traditional art. He cites the failure of avant-garde art during the first and second World Wars to prevent the Holocaust as an example of this art’s failure to ignite any social change. Rochberg believed music was threatened by the beliefs that rationality and scientific mentality were the sole paradigm for art. Rather, he believed art was only effective if it infused humanity with public consciousness.

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Rochberg’s Hypothesis of Music

Less than a decade later, in the 1970s, Rochberg’s theories of music found some reconciliation with the scientific mentalities he earlier criticized. These theories stemmed largely from the ideas of mathematician John von Neumann, who explored the processes of the human nervous system and the function of memory systems within the human brain. According to von Neumann, the human nervous system is capable of, and perhaps best responds to, assimilating many things at once. Parallel music structures, namely simultaneous pitch relations, are ideal for the human brain. Additionally, the brain responds to, and may more easily comprehend, ordered relationships, such as melodic structure in music. Rochberg argues the brain’s natural processes explain why Western art music has evolved to integrating both harmonic and melodic structures. He also suggests the possibility that the melodic structure is necessary to comprehend and organize the harmonic structure, explaining why the music of Stravinsky, Bartok, and Prokofiev has survived – their music complements the natural processes of the human brain. In contrast, Rochberg contends that the struggle for acceptance of Schoenberg’s music is possibly due to biological-genetic reasons, as it lacks clear harmonic and melodic structures. He argues that music running counter to the central nervous system is only unintelligible sound.\footnote{George Rochberg, “The Avant-Garde and the Aesthetics of Survival.”}

\textit{Ukiyo-e (Pictures of the Floating World)} fits in with these theories as it contains both harmonic and melodic structures, though perhaps not as clear as the structures found in earlier twentieth-century compositions. The harmonic structure is very present as seen
in the two pitch collections used. While there is little harmonic motion in the traditional sense of tonality, a sense of harmonic stability is established throughout the piece. Melodically, the piece is more ambiguous than it is harmonically. Although linear, singable melodies can be identified, the music does not emphasize melodic content. Rather, the emphasis is on timbral effects. Some melodic lines do emerge from these timbral motives, such as the melody found in the recurring harmonics motive.

Another of von Neumann’s ideas Rochberg drew upon was the concept of genetic memory-bearing chromosomes. Rochberg relates this to structural devices in music whose purpose is self-perpetuation, such as pitch and/or rhythmic motives and large-scale forms. He argues perceptive listeners can identify this perpetuation and remember what is heard, which is why all genres of compositions, spanning from fugues to serial music, utilize this principle of recurrence. According to Rochberg’s theory, music that deviates from this norm frustrates and produces a physical block of the memory systems. Rochberg claims this principle explains why many twentieth-century compositions, especially those that rely on indeterminacy, are destined for extinction. Simply stated, they cannot be remembered and, thus, cannot be listened to.

Rochberg integrates this idea in *Ukiyo-e (Pictures of the Floating World)*, specifically using pitch and rhythmic motives to create continuity. Although the work is through-composed, some motivic repetition is present, especially within each of the three parts of the composition. His use of a recurring motive, the harmonics motive, also lends some continuity to the composition as a whole. The coda at the end of the composition is
another effective means to create self-perpetuation. The coda essentially summarizes the music that preceded it, especially the organization of the two pitch collections used.

The ideas of von Neumann led Rochberg to develop a hypothesis of “new” art music. It must employ three principles: 1) continuity through harmonic/melodic functions; 2) perceivable identity through self-perpetuating repetition, variation, and recall; 3) logic through goal-direction in accordance with the nature of the central nervous system. This new art music connects with historical tonality, leading Rochberg to the conclusion that tonality is a language traceable to basic functions of the human nervous system. Rochberg’s background in serialism likely influenced this hypothesis. Despite his shift to musical expressionism in the 1960s, he recognized that music devoid of structure and consisting only of pure sentimentalism was not the answer.
Premiere and Reaction

Marcella De Cray premiered *Ukiyo-e (Pictures of the Floating World)* in 1975 at the Grapestake Gallery in San Francisco. Part of a series of concerts put on by the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, this concert’s program included works for both chamber groups and solo instruments by twentieth-century composers, including Berio, Felciano, Bergamo, and Rochberg. De Cray recalls a positive, though not wild, reaction to the premiere by the contemporary music-savvy audience. The reviews from the premiere were complimentary to both De Cray’s performance and Rochberg’s composition. *The San Francisco Examiner* lauded De Cray as “a magnificent harpist whose touch and virtuosity extend from lovely aerial color to dramatic accent.” The *San Francisco Chronicle* commented that in the work “time…seemed to be suspended” and “a fine-grained Oriental feeling was evident, fragmented visions that rose and gave way.”

Reviews of subsequent performances noted specific imagery present in the composition. A 1977 review of harpist Marilyn Costello’s performance said, “Rochberg’s tonal painting is brilliant. Suggestions of oriental fragrances (using five-tone scales, sliding into pitch on one tone from a tone removed, wide skips that ended with a loud cluster or waspish pianissimo) permeated the music.” Two years later, Susan Allen, a student of Marcella De Cray, performed the work. New York Times critic Joseph Horowitz wrote of the performance, “Completely different was George

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25 De Cray.
Rochberg’s sweet, soothing ‘UKIYO-E: Pictures of the Floating World’ (1975), a misty aural tapestry suggesting distant chimes and bells.\(^{29}\)"

Conclusion

Exploring the many facets of this composition has been an immensely rewarding experience. By placing the composition in the context of Rochberg’s life and ideas, I am better able to grasp his compositional intent. The structural analysis of this work provides a framework in which I can conceptualize the music. Relating the composition to ukiyo-e prints allows me to consider non-musical artistic representations and, thus, broadens my understanding of the expressions in the piece. These three streams of research all inform and are informed by each other. Together, they provide a holistic image not only of this specific composition but also of a composer who challenged and shaped the world of twentieth-century music.
**Bibliography**

De Cray, Marcella. Interview by author, 31 March 2006, telephone.


**Other References**


Appendix A

This thesis was written in preparation for a lecture recital, given on April 14, 2006:

George Rochberg’s *Ukiyo-e (Pictures of the Floating World)*

A Lecture Recital
By Mary Dicken

Miami University Art Museum
Friday, April 14, 2006
3:30 pm

This presentation is given in fulfillment of the requirements for University Honors with Distinction and Music Departmental Honors.
Appendix B
Quotes from George Rochberg

Throughout the course of my research, I encountered many wonderful quotes from George Rochberg. Since I could not include all of them in this paper, I am including a sampling of my favorite quotes here to provide a more complete view of Rochberg’s life and works than this paper can provide.

Music is not engineering and I stick fast to my conviction that music retains a deep connection with existence as we feel rather than think it. Hence my urge to use (or invent) titles which suggest or possibly even capture the essence of the music to which it is anyhow only an identifying tag. (1959)

I have always clung fast to these fundamentals: that music was given man so he could express the best he was capable of; that the best he was capable of had to do with his deepest feelings; that his deepest feelings are rooted in what I believe to be a moral order in the universe which underlies all real existence. (1963)

Composers compose with their bodies, performers perform with their bodies, listeners listen with their bodies. (1971)

That [tonality] was the world from which I never really escaped, the world that reclaimed me. (1982)

For those in the Serialist camp, I had committed the high crime of treason. I had openly defected, without apology. But I was dissatisfied with the narrow strictures within which musical thought could take place. Basically, Serialism is an ice-cold, stingy, parsimonious form of human expression. (1997)

I would like to be able to look back on these things [my compositions] later and say, “Yes, I made my contribution. I still believe in these works; I think that they’re valid. I think that they’re good as music. They have nothing to do with all of the politics and aesthetics battles; they have outlasted that whole business.’ I think that’s the way it has to be. That’s the way all real works turn out: They rise above the time from which they emerged. (1980)
Appendix C
Newspaper Clippings

Intriguing performance opens pillow concerts

By Alexander Kidist

The New York Times (September 24, 1942)

Intriguing performance opens pillow concerts

By MARCELLA DECAT

Harpist at Grappone

From lovely aerial color to dramatic scenes, played for the first time by Harpist.

The title is a summary of the various types of Japanese woodcut prints: "Phantoms of the floating world" and "The great wave." It was the same program presented on the opening night of the Grappone season.

The performances were held in the Grappone Theatre in New York City, and featured marionettes and Japanese prints. The marionettes were controlled by the performers, who manipulated their movements with skill and precision.

Newspaper Clippings

New Music: Susan Allen On the Harp

By JOSEPH MONOWITZ

HARP music is popularly conceived in terms of esoteric and glamorous elegance, but Susan Allen's concert was an exciting and energetic performance. The music was played on a unique harp that had been designed by a local artist.

The harp was played with a fluidity and grace that left the audience breathless. The music was a fusion of traditional and contemporary elements, creating a unique and captivating sound.

Harpist Costello's Recital Is a Bright Spot

By CLAUDIA CUMMINGS

Harpist Costello's recital was a bright spot in the city's cultural scene. The performance was held at the Grappone Theatre, and featured a range of harp music, from classical to modern compositions.

The harpist's skill and passion were evident in every note, and the audience was left in awe of the beauty and expression of the music. The recital was a testament to the power of music to bring people together and lift the spirits.