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Crowe delivers another new piece

The busy composer's 'Dreams of Wisdom' will debut Tuesday at uptown chamber music concert

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For proof that Charlotte has the beginnings of a creative class alongside the bankers, just look at David Crowe.

The Charlotte Symphony commissioned him in 2004 to write a multimedia piece conjuring up the Carolinas' textile past. "Mill Village: A Piedmont Rhapsody" has had more than 20 performances.

Carolina Voices tapped him to write a choral work tying in with Discovery Place's Dead Sea Scrolls show. After singing it several times last spring, the group will take it to Charleston's Piccolo Spoleto festival this spring.

Chamber Music at St. Peter's has kept him busy in the meantime. His new piece for the uptown series premieres Tuesday.

"It's been great," Crowe said a few days ago. "I couldn't be happier. I feel very honored to keep getting requests from people to write music for them."

After looking to Carolinas history and the Psalms for the earlier works, Crowe turned this time to a personal interest: paintings by Nicholas Roerich, a Russian artist of the early 20th century. The result is what Crowe calls "Dreams of Wisdom."

Actually, calling Roerich simply a painter is too narrow. He was a student of Russian folk culture, and that yielded a brush with musical history -- helping Igor Stravinsky shape the scenario for Stravinsky's revolutionary ballet "The Rite of Spring." Roerich designed sets for opera and ballet. He had a philosophical bent that led him to make pilgrimages to the Himalayas and settle in northern India. He promoted art as a force for international understanding during turbulent times.

All this fed into his more than 8,000 paintings. Crowe has admired them for more than 30 years.

"They're a little bit mystical," he said. "But there's something in the energy of the paintings. Because many of them have a spiritual context, or because they're great mountain landscapes, they have an aura to them that is very powerful."

Crowe's composition, "Dreams of Wisdom," is written for a quintet: cello, clarinet, piano, violin and percussion. Sections of the music evoke five of these paintings, which will be projected on a screen during the concert.

In "Kanchenjunga," a landscape of Himalayan peaks, the mountains' jagged outlines were the impetus for the music's arching melodies, Crowe's program notes explain. But for the most part, Crowe said, he aimed to reflect the paintings' vitality more than depict them in sound.

Crowe uses Tibetan temple instruments -- cymbals, bells and drums -- to launch "The Last Angel," based a painting that shows the celestial figure hovering over a landscape that's bursting into flame. "Burning of Darkness," from an image of religious figures marching through a mountain pass, provides the climax. The music ends, Crowe's notes say, with darting lines that "symbolize the piercing of darkness with bright shafts of light."

At Tuesday's concerts, Crowe will play the percussion instruments. That will be a quick turnaround from his role as the work's composer -- which he just put behind him.

"I finished 90 percent of it by the first of the month," Crowe said last week. "I just wanted to rework the last movement a little bit. That literally did not get finished until this morning. I just e-mailed out the parts." **PREVIEW**

Chamber Music at St. Peter's

This month's concerts feature the premiere of David Crowe's "Dreams of Wisdom."

WHEN: 12:10 and 5:30 p.m. Tuesday.

WHERE: St. Peter's Episcopal Church, North Tryon and Seventh streets.

ADMISSION: Free.

DETAILS: 704-335-0009; www.chambermusicatstpeters.org.

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