

Awaiting debut of new film

By FREDERIC KELLY

Robert Mugge, a former student at the University of Maryland Baltimore County, who is now in Philadelphia awaiting the premiere of his first television film, "George Crumb: Voice of the Whale," says he probably enjoys eccentric people almost as much as he enjoys making films.

That, at least, is partly the reason he decided to do a musical portrait of George Crumb, the Pulitzer Prize winning composer, who has been called everything from "a weirdo" to "a modern-day Beethoven."

"But the biggest reason," Bob Mugge said in a telephone interview earlier this week, "is that I happen to like his music. It's esoteric, but George Crumb is probably the most accessible of all the contemporary American composers. He is not afraid to use pleasant sounds, yet his music is highly original and unusual."

The film, made with a \$10,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, will be shown on the Public Broadcasting System (Channels 67, 22 and 26) Tuesday at 10 P.M. It features a performance of Mr. Crumb's "Vox Balaenae for Three Masked Players."

Mr. Mugge says the piece has "transcendental implications." There are three performers, a cellist, a pianist and a flutist, and all three perform in masks under blue lights.

"George Crumb likes anything that makes an interesting sound so he always uses a lot of interesting effects. The pianist in "Vox Balaenae," for example, plays inside the piano with glass rods at one point while the flutist sings at the same time she plays. I know it sounds weird, but it gives the music a fantastic texture."

Mr. Mugge, 28, a native of Silver Spring, says he became interested in doing a film on George Crumb, who won a Pulitzer in 1968 for his orchestral piece, "Echoes of Time and the River," while he was enrolled in the master's program in film at Temple University.

"I knew George Crumb was teaching

composition at the University of Pennsylvania, so when I got to Philadelphia I stopped by the university and introduced myself and told him someday I'd like to make a film about him. He agreed and when I got the grant in 1976 I went back and asked him if he still felt like doing the film. He said sure."

It took about five months to do it and Mr. Mugge, who produced a well-received film called "Frostburg" during his undergraduate days at UMBC, ran out of money at the end and had to work on credit.

"But everybody was great. People believed in the film and believed I would sell it to PBS, which I did eventually. The Maryland Center for Public Broadcasting saw it in the fall of 1976 and bought it early in 1977. It's producing it, but it will be shown nationally over PBS."

Mr. Mugge says he has made another film which will "probably" be sold to PBS sometime later this summer. It's an hour-long profile of Philadelphia Mayor Frank L. Rizzo titled "Amateur Night at City Hall: The Story of Frank L. Rizzo."

"It's alternately serious and satirical, but it tries to be fair," Mr. Mugge says, adding that the film was produced without the mayor's cooperation -- or blessing. "It mixes old newsclips with footage of him we got during some of his public appearances. I've also intercut shots taken during amateur night at a tavern in South Philadelphia, which points up the amateurishness of his politics."

Despite that judgment, Bob Mugge says he has nothing personal against Mayor Rizzo.

"I sort of enjoy him. He's like George Crumb: An original; off the wall. My next film probably will be along the same lines. I'm thinking of doing a profile of Sun Ra, an innovative black musician, who's got this avant-garde jazz orchestra. They use a lot of electronic instruments and acoustical instruments from Africa and dress up in a combination of African robes and space suits. They're really wild. A fantastic sound, too."