



**Morton Feldman Piano**

Philip Thomas

	Disc 1:	
1-4	<b>Last Pieces</b> (1959)	23:30
5	<b>Piano</b> (1977)	27:18
6	<b>Palais de Mari</b> (1986)	22:41

	Disc 2:	
1	<b>Untitled piano piece</b> (1942?) <i>first published recording</i>	1:00
2-5	<b>Illusions</b> (1949)	5:37
6-8	<b>Three Dances</b> (1950)	8:19
9-13	<b>Nature Pieces</b> (1951)	11:30
14	<b>Variations</b> (1951)	6:57
15-16	<b>Two Intermissions</b> (1950)	2:58
17	<b>Intermission 3</b> (1951)	1:53
18	<b>Intermission 4</b> (1952)	2:00
19	<b>Intersection 2</b> (1951)	10:45
20-22	<b>Three Pieces for Piano</b> (1954)	5:37
23	<b>Piano Piece 1955</b>	1:43
24	<b>Piano Piece 1956 A</b>	2:49
25	<b>Piano Piece 1956 B</b>	2:06
26	<b>Intermission 6</b> (1953) <i>first version</i>	7:51
27	<b>Intermission 5</b> (1952)	3:11

	Disc 3:	
1	<b>Intermission 6</b> (1953) <i>second version</i>	4:42
2	<b>Extensions 3</b> (1952)	6:27
3-4	<b>Music for the film 'Sculpture by Lipton'</b> (1954) <i>transcribed by Philip Thomas</i> <i>first published recording</i>	8:28
5	<b>Piano Piece 1952</b>	8:06
6	<b>Intersection 3</b> (1953)	3:56
7	<b>Piano Piece</b> (1964)	6:32
8	<b>Vertical Thoughts 4</b> (1963)	1:51
9	<b>Figure of Memory [For Merle Marsicano]</b> (1954) <i>first published recording</i>	4:59
10	<b>Piano Piece (to Philip Guston)</b> (1963)	4:42
11	<b>Intermission 6</b> (1953) <i>third version</i>	11:07
12	<b>Triadic Memories</b> (1981) <i>start</i>	16:44

	Disc 4:	
1	<b>Triadic Memories</b> (1981) <i>continued</i>	74:13

	Disc 5:	
1	<b>For Bunita Marcus</b> (1985)	69:26

## Morton Feldman Piano

### Thoughts on performance

#### *On intimacy*

It is perhaps a well-worn trope to characterise Feldman's music as inviting the listener *into* the sound rather than projecting sound outward, *toward* the listener. But, within the generally quiet (and usually extremely quiet) parameters of Feldman's sound-world, it is surely true that, over time, one's ears become more finely attuned to its detail and complexities. To think of Feldman's music as being about *quietness*, however, is to miss the point – this is merely the means by which the sound is foregrounded. Whilst it is probably advisable not to play these recordings overly loudly, I might also suggest that playing the music too quietly over speakers or headphones would be to miss much of the detail which is so

vital to this music, such as the subtle and short-lived harmonics and changing resonances and changing resonances in *Piano Piece 1956a* or the varied articulations and rhythmic detail in *Triadic Memories*. So instead of adding, as is sometimes included in liner notes accompanying recordings of Feldman, directions to the effect of 'this music is quiet, turn it down', I might suggest something like 'these sounds are rich and complex, turn it up'.

The approach taken with this set of recordings has been to try to capture the experience of the pianist as closely as possible, or, better still, to record such that the resultant audio is as if the listener is somehow snuggled inside the body of the instrument, ears almost touching the strings, feeling the vibrations as the hammer strikes. The aim in recording was for intimacy of private experience, distinct from the shared experience of listening

to Feldman's music in the concert hall. Thus not only is the strike of the piano hammers keenly felt, but also the varied types of release of the key and consequent sound of the damper striking the string, the shifts in pedalling, the sound of notes being silently depressed in order to create harmonics, the more percussive properties of the upper registers, and their accompanying resonances, in contrast to the booming gong-like glow of the very lowest. It turns out that Feldman's music can, in fact, be quite noisy. This has, of course, required some compromise – as the listener will realise, not all Feldman's music is quiet: some early pieces reflect something of the influence of his tutor Stefan Wolpe and others, and a number of pieces include loud interruptions within the otherwise quiet and static character they project. In such cases we have chosen to either adapt the recording levels for individual pieces or temper the degree of

loudness accorded to the isolated events, such that the difference in sound is not as great as it would be in live performance. But these exceptions notwithstanding, the emphasis upon intimacy has been the primary guide through the whole project, no less relevant to the longer later works than to the briefest of the early pieces, such as the first *Intermissions*. Just as, for Feldman, 'scale is no barrier to an intimate art' (Villars, 80), so the reductionist aesthetic of, for example, the 70-minute *For Bunita Marcus* explores a consistently tender and nuanced play around just a few collections of sounds.

The complexity of the listening experience is, then, broadly of two types: in relation to instrumental sound and touch, and arising from the compositional, notational and performance demands. Of the former type I might include issues of decay, pedalling, register and touch, and of the latter techniques

of indeterminacy, rhythmic and pitch notation, memory and repetition.

### *On pianos and touch*

Playing Feldman's music inevitably changes, or at least brings into greater focus, aspects of one's technique. By and large the orientation is toward the vertical aspects of piano playing – the attack – rather than the horizontal – the line. Yet Feldman made much of his desire for instrumental sound *devoid* of attack, which is hard enough for most instruments, but for instruments whose action is fundamentally percussive, such as the piano, one might justifiably regard such a desire as fantasy. Yet somehow knowing this greatly affects how one treats the instrument: for me, the necessary action of depressing the keys serves to release the sound, setting strings into motion. My personal history of the piano

and my development as a pianist is inextricably associated with Feldman's music, more than any other composer, having performed his music regularly for the past 25 years. Thus when I see Feldman's scores I *feel* them; when I see a note within the context of Feldman's music I have a sense of action, or movement, and of touch. This is less a form of synaesthesia than the inevitable product of a prolonged and regular engagement with the music.

The importance of the instrument itself is a well-known element of Feldman's practice, who often talked about writing for the 'right' instruments. Instrumental sound was at the heart of what could be considered a highly conventional practice. And, as the piano was his instrument, and he wrote so much for the instrument – as well as for particular pianists – the piano is something he talked about frequently:

*[at the age of fourteen, ...my] mother sent me into New York to Steinway's on Fifty-seventh Street, to their huge basement, to buy a piano. You can't imagine what that price meant, and I'll never forget another thing. They didn't come along and tell me which one, what color, anything. I picked it out myself. I found one with an absolutely singular tone. It helped my ears. When I wasn't playing it I put the top down and used it as a desk. I lived at it, practically in it. (Friedman, 113)*

This same piano stayed with him, continuing to inform his work: 'I still have it, it's "my piano", the others are not pianos. My piano always plays Feldman. If you play Chopin, Schumann, Mozart, on my piano it's always Feldman.' (Villars, 39). Feldman clearly identified his music with his instrument – or vice versa. If we were to toy with notions of authenticity then we might argue that what constitutes the Feldman piano 'sound' is inextricably bound to Feldman's own piano. His early sensitivity to the sound

of the instrument undoubtedly informed his compositional technique – he admitted only a few years before his death to always composing at the instrument – as well as his output: music for solo piano dominates his catalogue, stretching from his earliest works through to his last, and the instrument features in his last composed piece, *Piano, Violin, Viola, Cello* (1987). Even the longest period during which no music for solo piano was composed, the thirteen years between *Piano Piece 1964* and the 1977 work entitled simply *Piano*, works for ensemble invariably feature the piano, including music with multiple pianos such as *False Relationships and the Extended Ending* (1968), *Between Categories* (1969) and *Five Pianos* (1972), as well as *Piano and Orchestra* (1975) which features a second piano as part of the orchestra.

B.H.Friedman described Feldman

at the piano in evocative terms:

*In 1955, when I first visited Feldman's New York apartment, he sat down at the piano and played a short work. I don't remember its name - I think it was simply called "Piano Piece" - but I do remember his massive, top-heavy presence, the large head and broad back looming above a piano stool that looked like an inadequate base for a substantial sculpture. Then, with an exquisite delicacy that was initially surprising and subsequently inseparable from this large man and his music, he began to play. (Friedman, xi)*

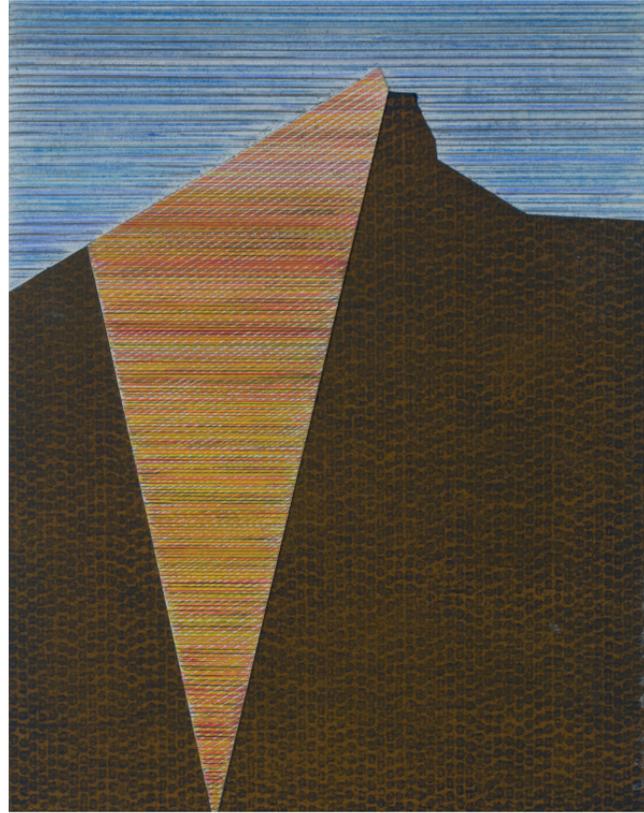
Feldman himself also made observations about the music of other composers in relation to their physiology:

*It is interesting that the composers of the past are also remembered as legendary performers. Perhaps this was what gave a certain realistic, physical aspect to the music they wrote. The daring harmonic excursions of Beethoven in some of the late sonatas have the feeling of his fingers as well as his ear. The same can be said of passages in Chopin, Liszt, Scriabin, Debussy. (Friedman, 34)*

He clearly recognised the importance of the tactile to his composition process: 'I think there are three things working with me: my ears, my mind, and my fingers. I don't think that it's just ear. That would mean that I'm just improvising, and I'm writing down what I like, or I'm writing down what I don't like. But I think those three parameters are always at work.' (Villars, 52). (He also noted the importance of touch and physicality to the actual act of composition, writing of the 'ephemeral feel of the pencil in my hand when I work' (Friedman, 30).)

Qualities of pitch and touch are entwined in Feldman's music:

*I mean pitch is a gorgeous thing. If you have a feeling, a tactile feeling for the instrument, what you can do with just your finger - something I learned from my [piano] teacher that taught the Czar's children. The way she would put her finger down, in a Russian way, just the finger. The lightness of the finger. And*



produce a B flat, and you wanted to faint. ...

*'That's why I don't like electronic music. I think pitch is too beautiful for that electronic sound, to get near it, too beautiful to be played on an accordion. (Villars, 199)*

This relationship between the visual and the tactile – between inner experience and exterior practice – leads to a conception of music notation that is, for me, primarily felt rather than heard. Though my physical presence and characteristics are quite different from those of Feldman, I recognise and respond to the significance of touch in his music. When I see his scores the very first sense that comes into play is that of touch: it's less 'how would that Eb *sound*' but more 'how would that Eb *feel*'. This is not just about the sensation of my finger on ivory, nor is it the same as looking at a musical score and instantly conceptualising fingerings for it – as I might in a sonata by Mozart, for example, or

a piece by Schoenberg. Instead it concerns the whole mechanism of the instrument – how the hammer is raised to strike the string, how my wrist is brought down to trigger the mechanism, which part of my finger is used at the moment flesh engages with key. In an interview with Eileen Kopstick concerning *Piano* (1977), Feldman discussed this element of his own technique, warning against voicing each chord but bringing contrast to each sound: 'loosen up the touch... use degrees of strong fingers and relaxed fingers.' (Kopstick, 108). With Feldman it is the quality of sonority that leads me to conceptualise it as something felt, and in much of the music the focus is upon each and every sound for itself, for its own qualities. (That's not to say that it might also be informed by the sounds that precede it, as Catherine Hirata argues in her excellent article 'The Sound of the Sounds Themselves', but

fundamentally my sense is toward how I might play that note, or that aggregate of notes.) Thus when I see a low note in Feldman I don't conceptualise its pitch (relative to another pitch) but I conceptualise its register and its consequent sonority (and likewise for high register notes). This surely partly explains Feldman's innovations with graph techniques (heard on these recordings in *Intersection 2* and *Intersection 3*), in which Feldman divided the instrumental range into three areas - high, middle, and low. Somewhat tongue-in-cheek, Hirata goes so far as to suggest that Feldman's conceptualisation of touch and sound were so bound to his own touch and technique that any other pianist's touch represents a deviation, albeit a necessary one, and that the directions for very quiet playing with a minimum of attack were a means of reducing that intervention.

The pianist John Tilbury is fond of quoting Roland Barthes, who wrote that the 'pad of the fingers' is 'the only erotic part of the pianist's body... whose 'grain' is so rarely heard' (Barthes, 189). Elsewhere Barthes writes about language as erotic play, but he involves the finger as the metaphoric replacement for words (A Lovers Discourse), as if there's something about the finger flesh which is both deeply sensual and at the heart of creativity. Feldman is not so far from Barthes when he talked about his piano teacher, Madame Press (quoted above). All this draws attention to the materiality of the sound having a basis in some deep and sensuous contact between flesh and instrument. At the same time, for me it also has to do with the action prior to contact – how I lift my hand, my wrist, the sensation in my arm, the degree of tension felt, the balance of control and suppleness in my fingers, the angle of my

finger as it approaches the key, the combination of finger-tip and finger-pad, the degree of finger lift before the contact, the velocity of the attack. ALL of these things are part of my conceptualisation of the sound in response to the notation. This complex set of configurations, each speaking to each other in mysterious ways, point to what I feel is the complex nature of the sound-world, none of which has anything to do with dynamics, other than that they would have very different meanings were they within the context of dynamics other than *ppp*. The inconsistencies of my touch combine with the registral differences, the variances within the piano action, the performance demands of the piece (speed of action required, differences in notation), the resonance of the hall (as well as, in the recording context, the particular idiosyncrasies of the microphones used and positioned), to create

a music which is unstable, always in flux, richly complex, revealing a multitude of ways in which 'as quietly as possible' (to name just one of the different ways Feldman asks for dynamics that are at the extreme ends of quietness) might be perceived. The results on this recording are, then, merely a snapshot of a time spent exploring the music over a number of days and months in Huddersfield. After the action, though, there is only the decay.

#### *On decay*

I am fascinated by the decay of the piano sound, and in particular by the point at which the sound seems to really be on its way out, or when it is almost absent. The journey that the decay makes to that point is in itself fascinating: always in front of me, mysterious, unseen, often behind my piano music stand, having a life entirely of its own, sometimes seeming

to increase in amplitude as the wave forms collide and interact. But at some time the decay – which Feldman describes as a 'departing landscape... leaving us rather than coming towards us' (Friedman, 25) – reaches the point of departure and I ready myself for the next sound. Judging that point is both a musical and experimental, technical decision – I might choose to cut short the decay and play a new sound, or I may choose to listen closely to the actual end of the sound as I perceive it (which may be before or after the point at which an audience member, seated some distance from the instrument, with the lid of the piano projecting the sound toward her, perceives the sound – these recordings attempt to portray something of the pianist's experience of the sound, rather than that of a concert audience). *Intermission 6* suggests a performance approach which is based

precisely on this phenomena, directing the pianist to move to the next sound only when the present sound has faded away, meaning that the interpretative decisions are experimental, reliant upon what *actually happens* in performance, rather than some kind of *musical play*, trying to make (conventional?) sense of the continuity. I have adopted a broadly similar approach to the two slow movements of *Last Pieces*, and in particular the third movement, both of which state that durations are free. Rather than improvising durations such that a rhythmic interplay moulds the sequence of sounds – which, here, would undoubtedly be informed to some degree by notions of tonal resolution, repetition, and phrasing – my focus is upon the sounds and their decay. Referring to a piece contemporaneous with *Last Pieces*, the *Piece for 4 Pianos* (1957), Feldman criticised performers for listening to the other performers

and trying to make it more 'effective':

*You're just to listen to the sounds and play it as naturally and as beautifully as you can within your own references. If you're listening to the other performers, then the piece tends also to become rhythmically conventional....*

*When you play an instrument, you're not only playing the instrument; the instrument is playing you. (Villars, 88)*

The instruction in *Last Pieces* is treated, then, not as 'Durations are free for the pianist to impose at will', but as 'Durations – i.e. sounds – are free!', that is to say, not measured but attended to.

#### *On Notation*

Feldman appeared to be on a constant search for new notations that best encapsulated his compositional and performance concerns, with each solution affording fresh insights and problems for the performer.

This is not a matter of early and late 'style' – even over a period of just two years in the early 1950s it is remarkable how varied and experimental are the different notational techniques he employed. Taking an overview of both the period 1950-1964 and the full range of his piano output a picture emerges of a composer constantly searching for form and notation, and the ways in which these inform and speak to each other. At one level these innovations could be viewed as a compositional conceit only, and there is little doubt that Feldman viewed the framework of the page, and the way content is arranged across the page, as a compositional parameter. But for the performer the notation serves to energise the action, inform the continuity, and, more generally, influence character.

The relationship between the draughtsmanship of Feldman's

hand and performance is at best mysterious, but observations might be made by a comparison of those scores which exist as printed copy and their associated manuscripts. Whilst care has been taken by both Volker Straebel, who prepared the publication of the early works for Edition Peters, and the typesetter of the Universal Edition publications of later works, to reflect something of Feldman's notational design, the fact that these remain different, and that henceforth something is lost, cannot be denied.<sup>1</sup> For these recordings I have made use of manuscript copies for all music, allowing Feldman's delineations of a page as a container for musical form and content to influence my interpretation even if at times subliminally. (The confusion that arises when bars of the same spatial length are

assigned very different temporal durations ultimately seemed a price worth paying, though the poor legibility of *Piano* caused me ultimately to resort to the typeset score for ease of reading in performance.) Certainly, the continuity from one page to the next is affected by the sense of Feldman beginning a new page afresh, even if that new beginning is a repeat, or a continuation of previous material. This is particularly true of the later pieces, where the changes of texture and type of material, especially (in *Piano*) superimpositions, at the beginnings of pages are entirely transparent to the eye.

Occasionally errors are made and discrepancies may be observed, either in Feldman's manuscript, or the copy prepared for publication, or the later typeset

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<sup>1</sup> See Hall (2007) for a useful outline of some of the differences between manuscript and type copies. See also Straebel (1998).



editions, sometimes in more than one of these. Whilst often these are relatively straightforward to identify, at other times differences between copies have forced a decision to be made which is by no means certain as to its preferred status. One of the most curious features of the multiple copies available – drawn from published materials, and manuscripts in the Feldman collection at the Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, and the David Tudor papers at the Getty Institute, Los Angeles – is the changes of pitch spelling. For example, in one copy Feldman might write a G flat and in another, for the same note, an F sharp. Though these are, as far as the piano is concerned, the same pitch, how they function, especially in relation to other notes in a chord, to my ears – and thus also to my touch – changes. Similar changes are made between copies concerning the octave disposition – in one copy Feldman might write

a note at the exact pitch indicated, sometimes with multiple ledger lines, whilst in another he might employ an octave, or double-octave, transposition sign. This is particularly pronounced in *Piano Piece 1952*, where in one manuscript version the majority of notes are written on or close to the staff, with assorted octavia signs (also with one note per bar), and in another these are written mostly at pitch (without bar lines), the visual appearance, then, shifting from one where pitch is foregrounded to another where register is indicated more clearly. One further peculiarity between copies occurs where a grace note figure in one copy is replaced by a rhythmicised non-grace note figure in another. This may make little difference in the way of actual time taken over such groups, but the shift in articulation is – at least to this pianist – significant. In all of these examples the differences would seem to follow

no particular pattern; it is as if, on re-writing the score, perhaps for publication, Feldman re-hears it, almost re-composes it, or indeed re-performs it. There's something wonderfully intimate about these re-spellings, suggesting a close attention to the mysteries of pitch and touch, as if Feldman (who was very short-sighted) tries to get as close as possible to these qualities – looking, hearing, touching, searching – toying with alternatives before arriving at the precise final notated form.

Possibly the area within which Feldman was most experimental was that of rhythm, or, more aptly, how and when sounds occur within time. The range of techniques employed in this regard is quite astonishing – from sounds of equal duration throughout (*Piano Piece 1952*) to sounds of indeterminate duration; from Webernian continuities in simple

three-time to passages of immense complexity. The influence of European modern music is most obvious in the more gestural early works, particularly *Illusions*, but also in the small, tight-knit, highly expressive gestures of the music from the mid-1950s. Feldman's visual and temporal grid may contain music of great complexity, as in the fast movements of *Nature Pieces* and the indeterminate graph pieces *Intersections 2* and *3*; or, at the other extreme (though in its own way no less complex), highly reduced content, such as the entirely grace-note material of *Variations*, which is scattered across a fixed grid of bar-lines in ways that suggest a rhythmless, floating quality, despite the fixed temporality of the grid. The character of these pieces owes much to their notational experimentation, however ultimately Feldman would appear to find none of them best served

his desire for a non-rhythmicised, non-teleological sensation of time. (Perhaps the *Intersections* come closest, with their suggestion of sounds entering at any time within the box they are assigned; however, the very fast tempi of both these, whilst pushing the complexity of Feldman's language in many ways, ultimately limit a discernible degree of irregularity of attack.) The ensemble pieces of the early 1960s, in which durations are free for each sound and each player, causing a disruption between notated alignments between players and sounding result, paved the way for the duration-less noteheads of *Vertical Thoughts IV* and *Piano Piece (for Philip Guston)*. In these pieces the pianist negotiates the continuities of such noteheads (which, though free, are nevertheless ascribed

a metronome indication range) with an assortment of pauses, rests, ties and grace notes. In *Piano Piece 1964* Feldman, as if dissatisfied with the previous method, combines stemless noteheads, with notes of duration, bars of indeterminate length and bars with fixed time signatures, all within a widely varying metronome band. However, none of these quite match the level of complexity in performance afforded by the fourth of the *Last Pieces*, composed just a few years earlier, in which 'durations are free for each hand' – an instruction which, when combined with the instruction 'Very fast', can result in considerable confusion and anxiety (in a letter to Feldman following a performance of *Last Pieces*, Cornelius Cardew described the piece as 'problematic')<sup>2</sup> and

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<sup>2</sup> Cornelius Cardew, Letter to Morton Feldman, May 18th, 1961 [uncertain], Morton Feldman collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel.

which is a method of decoupling to which Feldman would not return within a solo piece.

Thirteen years later Feldman's *Piano* features notational challenges of a very different kind. The grid remains, now assigned changing time signatures, but within it material is notated with a high degree of rhythmic complexity and detail, similar to the ensemble pieces contemporary with and subsequent to it. When listening only, the range of durations and irregularity of continuity are in many ways no greater than in *Intermission 6* or *Piano Piece 1963 (for Philip Guston)*, but now the durations are fixed and measured, ensuring a degree of temporal irregularity that those earlier pieces do not guarantee. Combined with the extreme range of register and the variety of articulations resulting from the rhythmic notation and changes in texture and register, the piece is undoubtedly the most varied and detailed of all

the works recorded here. These complexities are increased when Feldman superimposes lines from earlier pages, first two, then three (over six staves), without compromising anything for ease of performance. Some impossibilities result as complex chords from different lines collide to create simultaneities which would require additional hands, or – as has been my preference – some changes to the exact rhythmic detail. Such impossibilities, however, only go to suggest that, here and in the three subsequent 'late' pieces, Feldman's desire is less for an exactitude of rhythmic detail (though attention to such detail is surely warranted to avoid curtailing the irregularities of duration) as for employing a notation which serves to encourage the performer to focus upon detail and idiosyncrasies of touch and timing. Thus it is that comparatively simple rhythms are notated in ways more complicated than necessary, reflecting again

The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation for Morton Feldman's 'Piano 77'. It consists of six staves of music, arranged in two columns of three. The notation is highly complex, featuring overlapping lines from different pages, as mentioned in the text. There are numerous accidentals, including flats and naturals, and various rhythmic markings such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings. The overall appearance is that of a dense and intricate score, reflecting the 'complexities' and 'impossibilities' described in the text.

Piano77 - Morton Feldman „Piano für Klavier“  
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Feldman's problematising of music notation – 'If notated exactly, they are too stiff; if given the slightest notational leeway, they are too loose' he once wrote, concerning the kinds of complex arrangements found in *Piano* and other pieces from this period (Friedman, 142-3). Sometimes he chose to notate the same rhythm – or, more precisely, notes of the same duration – in two different ways, such as two dotted crotchets in one bar and the same notes but arranged as two minims with the metric ratio 4:3 covering them; these have the same literal duration but they *feel* distinct, in terms of articulation, propulsion, and consequently touch, leading Kevin Volans to suggest that Feldman 'is the first composer in Western music (that I know of) to compose 'touch' into the score' (Volans, 11).

Performance approaches to these late works are hardly clarified by the evidence of Feldman's words, specifically his comments upon the performances of *Triadic Memories* by its two dedicatees, Aki Takahashi and Roger Woodward, which are amongst the most detailed set of statements we have from the composer concerning the performance of his late music. The existing recordings by both Takahashi and Woodward represent probably the two most eccentric interpretations in the catalogue.<sup>3</sup> Woodward seems to ignore the rhythmic nuances of the opening section – in which each bar presents slight rhythmic variations of a repeated figure – by playing each figure as three regular quavers, and similar approximations and deviations recur throughout his performance. Takahashi, in contrast, presents

a far more nuanced and febrile performance, as well as employing a tempo considerably faster than any other recording, so that the whole piece lasts one hour (Woodward's recording, like my own recording here, lasts just under 90 minutes). However, her detailed account differs from the rhythmic specificity of the score. And here is where an interesting problem lies with regard to Feldman's rhythmic notation: examining the manuscript score (which is still available from

Universal Edition upon request), rather than the typeset published score, reveals a graphic distribution of notes which at times contradicts the actual rhythmic value. Thus notes arranged across three staves – a frequent occurrence in the piece – which rhythmically occur at the same time are in fact written in Feldman's hand as *unaligned* events. It might be argued that the precise rhythmic detail which Feldman writes is not as complex as the spatialisation of



Triadic Memories - Morton Feldman "Triadic Memories|für Klavier"  
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<sup>3</sup> Aki Takahashi, *Morton Feldman – Triadic Memories* (ALM Records, ALCD-33, 1989); Roger Woodward, *Morton Feldman – Triadic Memories* (Etcetera, KTC 2015, 1991).

notes in his score. It would seem that Takahashi, entirely reasonably and very sensitively, prioritises the sequence and relationship of notes as they appear graphically over the actual rhythmic exactitude, as more accurately portrayed in the typeset score. That these two very different and idiosyncratic approaches are offered by the joint dedicatees of *Triadic Memories* poses an interesting set of problems for the pianist approaching the work today, problems which are not resolved by Feldman's reflections. Writing in 1982, he made reference to the title of the piece in relation to the pianists:

*[Triadic Memories] has a double meaning for me. Not only does it have a lot to do with the way the piece was made.... But it has to do with memories and recent memories of three very important performers in my life at the piano. One was David Tudor, in the early years. The other is Australian pianist*

*Roger Woodward, and of course, Aki Takahashi. And more than any piece I ever wrote, many times it was as if I was just taking dictation, remembering the way David played, thinking about Roger's playing and Aki's playing. And to some degree, they're part of Triadic Memories in writing a piece. The importance of a performer to a composer is just something one sees on a dedication page, and unless one is a musicologist or you really get into it, you just really don't know the involvement, to what degrees a performer could influence the kind of music the composer might play.... David Tudor: amazing reflexes, focused on just one mosaic at a time, a nondirectional approach of equal intensity and clarity, regardless of what was being played, an accumulative effect of time being frozen. Roger Woodward: more traditional, which also means more unpredictable in how he shapes and paces. I would call it a prose style. Where Tudor focused on a moment, Woodward would find the quintessential touch of the work, hold on to it and then as in one giant breath, articulate the music's overall scale. Like Tudor, Woodward played everything as primary material. He is a long-distance*

*runner. Tudor jumps high over the bar. Where Tudor isolates the moment, by not being influenced by what we might consider a composition's cause and effect, and Woodward finds the right tone that savours the moment and extends it. Aki Takahashi is very different. Takahashi appears to be absolutely still. Undisturbed, unperturbed, as if in a concentrated prayer. Kafka writes about approaching his work as if in a state of prayer....The effect of her playing to me is that I feel privileged to be invited to a very religious ritual. (Villars, 153-6)*

Feldman, then, recognises the individuality and of each pianist's technique and interpretative approach, and would seem to celebrate that difference. No mention is given to matters of accuracy or detail. In contrast, however, Dirk de Klerk recalls Feldman's lectures in Johannesburg, a year later, and his discussion of *Triadic Memories*:

*In order to compose Triadic Memories, Feldman said that he sat at a piano, and*

*found a balance, which is precarious. He also made an effort to keep the rhythm from being 'directional'. That means that he carefully notated the rhythm to avoid a predictable pulse and predictable rhythmic relationships. Feldman encouraged the pianist Roger Woodward, the dedicatee, to memorise Triadic Memories. He described Woodward's consummate performance, so close to his musical intentions, as 'eliminating the performer'. In the same context, he said that Fournier makes Bach speak rather than interpreting Bach (as Casals does). It is significant that although there are many inconsistencies with the score in Woodward's performance, he nevertheless preferred it to the more accurate performance of Aki Takahashi, who played it with less understanding.' [fn: '[H]e [Roger Woodward] gets the mood, Aki ... Aki doesn't have the right ... She's stuck between the kind of objectivity and subjectivity, and just stuck in there some place.'](de Klerk, 27-28)*

This is fascinating for the contradiction between Feldman's desire to 'avoid a predictable

pulse and predictable rhythmic relationships' (which, in terms of the literal rhythms notated, is hardly the case, as the 4:3 ratio which litters so much of the first half of the piece simply shifts the metre from one in three time to one in four time) and his liking for Woodward's performance, which distorts and regularises the rhythmic detail. Despite these comments, Takahashi's playing – which I find to be exquisitely nuanced and perceptive – captured Feldman's imagination sufficiently for him to closely associate her playing with his next (and last) two solo piano pieces. My own approach has been to observe the literal rhythmic detail of the music – arguably *Triadic Memories* exists now as a published typeset score, no matter that it is both more 'correct' than the manuscript copy and detracts from it – whilst allowing something of the spirit of both pianists' interpretations to influence the

sense of movement. Whatever one's view of any of these and other performances, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that even at this late stage, Feldman's quest for a notation that suited his intent was far from over.

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Despite the differences of approach depicted by these two pianists and many others not referenced here, I had some doubt about adding to their number. At the time of writing, there exist 15 CD recordings of both *Triadic Memories* and *For Bunita Marcus* - the catalogue does not need another of either. However, after resisting the urge to set down on record this music which at various times in my life has meant so much to me, and which I have also deliberately avoided from time to time only to find it pulling me back, the idea of recording it all as a set, to find out how one piece rubs against another, where the

contrasts and points of contact are, felt right. Although this also gave me the opportunity to explore a small number of works previously unfamiliar to me, including a number of unpublished works, as well as the excuse to at last visit the Paul Sacher Foundation to examine the manuscripts and much else, I have avoided labelling this as a 'complete works' set. There are omissions – pieces from the mid-1940s, dating from the period Feldman studies with Wallingford Riegger and into the period of study with Stephan Wolpe, which I have chosen not to include, in part because these are works which, in my view, were composed before Feldman became 'Feldman' (which some might argue is true also of *Illusions* though the beginnings of an avant-garde sensibility are at work here, and this is an important work not least because it was

the first he composed for David Tudor), and also because these have already been recorded, by Debora Petrina, and thus may be readily referenced.<sup>4</sup> Recording for Another Timbre was an important and obvious decision for me – over twenty years ago I first performed *Triadic Memories* in what was then the Mappin Art Gallery in Sheffield, and it was at that performance that I first met Simon Reynell. Little did we know then that twenty years hence we would be recording that same music for a release such as this. I am extremely grateful to him for making this happen, as well as for the enthusiasm and generosity of spirit that underlies all Another Timbre releases.

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<sup>4</sup> Debora Petrina, Morton Feldman - Early and Unknown Piano Works (OgreOgress Productions, B0000VJAP0, 2003).

## On the music

### Early and unpublished music

Manuscripts of a number of early pieces exist, preserved in the Feldman collection at the Paul Sacher Foundation. The *Sonata* (dedicated to Béla Bartók), *Preludio*, and *Self-Portrait*, dating from 1943-5, are all composed from either the end of Feldman's studies with Wallingford Riegger, or the beginning of his study with Stefan Wolpe, and are curiously expressive pieces, perhaps betraying a teenage existentialism. Though these are not included in this set, a shorter, more Satie-like untitled piece, which likely dates from around this time (though there is no direct evidence for such a claim, and it may even be an unfinished piece or sketch), has been included, as the opening piece of disc two. Its directness of expression, classical

restraint and triple-time metre at the very least points toward some of the elegantly conceived pieces of the mid-1950s. Feldman once described all his music dating from before 1950 as 'student' pieces (Villars, 151), and certainly the pieces in the Sacher Foundation, though fascinating, might be said to have been composed before Feldman became 'Feldman'.

Other than the short curiosity which opens the second disc, the earliest piece included on the set is the *Illusions* composed in 1949. This was published in the journal *New Music. A Quarterly of Modern Composition*<sup>5</sup> and would appear to be a transitional work – perhaps the first example of Feldman becoming Feldman –, the first two movements pointing back to the aforementioned earliest pieces. The third and fourth movements

– both very fast and characterised by a continuous stream of regular notes values – anticipate the faster movements of *Nature Pieces*. Like those movements, dynamics are minimal, and are mostly either quiet or loud. The difficulty of these pieces are of a different order to the pieces from a few years earlier, which, though not simple by any means, are more conventional than the David Tudor-inspired virtuosity of *Illusions*.

*The Three Dances* (1950) have never been published perhaps because of the reductive nature of the material, which contains more bars of silence than of sound. Having first met Tudor, through their associations with Wolpe, it was not long before Feldman met Cage, and the associations between the two, and their mutual influence upon each other's work has been much discussed. But perhaps no piece by Feldman reveals Cage's influence as much

as the *Three Dances*. It is not just that it was composed for a dance, as was the majority of Cage's music of the previous decade, nor indeed the inclusion of percussion as musical material in the third movement – drum and glass, unique amongst Feldman's solo piano music – but the rhythmic character, the piano sonorities, the limited range of sounds employed, and the use of (extended) silence are all redolent of Cage's prepared piano music and music of the late 1940s such as *The Seasons*. The influence of Cage's music from this period on subsequent works can be similarly seen through the technique of a single sound with a 'coloured' attack – that is, a chord released immediately to reveal a single held sonority – which can be seen in Feldman's piano writing even up to *Palais de Mari*. The manuscript used for this recording reveals Feldman's markings – in a sense, it is both score and realisation – which

<sup>5</sup> *New Music. A Quarterly of Modern Composition*, 23/4 (October 1951).

suggest changes to the counting, and additional repeats in places, most probably in response to the dance, which was performed by Merle Marsicano. Possibly these markings reflect the decisions of or directions for the first pianist to perform it, Edwin Hymovitz; here the approach has been to observe the counts in the score rather than those which take the form of performance markings, but one might in other performances consider the duration as being more flexible.

Two other unpublished pieces are included on this set, but these date from later in the 1950s (1954), and both are pieces for which Feldman's manuscript is lost. The later of these is two pieces which are transcriptions made from piano performances included in the film 'Sculpture by Lipton',

directed by Nathan Boxer, about the American sculptor Seymour Lipton, in which the sounds of his workshop combine with Feldman's music to particularly good effect.<sup>6</sup> My approach here has been to loosely notate the pitches and then perform my transcriptions as set apart from their original use within the film, rather than align timings with their original setting. The exact pitch content at each attack is confused by the poor quality of the original recording, though I am grateful for the cleaned-up version on Chris Villars' website, and in particular to pianist Florian Steininger, with whom I have enjoyed an enlightening correspondence and who very generously shared his own transcriptions with me.

The earlier of the unpublished works is *Figure of Memory*,

possibly the music which is most 'un-Feldman-like' in its form and content of all the pieces included in this set. Yet, as Ryan Dohoney describes, it was performed frequently and regularly from its inception through to the 1970s, as the music for a dance performance given by Merle Marsicano (Dohoney, 8-9). The score housed at the Sacher Foundation is a reconstruction donated by the pianist with whom Marsicano worked in performances after Tudor had ceased to perform it, Edwin Hymovitz (see *Three Dances* above). It consists solely of three lines of music, each presenting a repeated pattern (the third 'pattern' is simply a series of repeated notes), and the pianist is directed to move between each line in random order, with breaks between each.

#### *The early 1950s*

As noted earlier, the music

Feldman composed during the first few years of the 1950s reveals an extraordinary range of techniques and notational methods applied to diverse materials. This was a composer who, it would seem, was testing different approaches literally from one piece to the next, not just in the piano music but across his output. The earliest of these is *Nature Pieces*, which remained unpublished until Volker Straebel's edition for Edition Peters in 1998, and which itself contains a variety of material across its five movements. It is another piece composed for the dance, now for Jean Erdman, who first performed it with Tudor at the piano in January 1952. In the first, third and fifth movements, the beat is taken to be equivalent to the bar, so although the first movement has the notational appearance of a series of regular pulses, these are in fact quintuplet subdivisions of the pulse. The speed of these movements, combined with the combinations of

<sup>6</sup> Extracts from the film, including Feldman's music, can be viewed on Chris Villars' superb Feldman resource <https://cnvill.net/mffilmmusic.htm>

regular and irregular dispositions of the beat, lead to a lively and complex experience that belies the apparent simplicity of the notation. (The fifth movement is marked at an extremely fast tempo, possibly erroneous and almost certainly utopian, which is difficult to maintain throughout its duration.) The second and fourth movements are more unusual still, the former characterised by chords accumulating in intensity, each articulated by the type of Cage-ian chordal attacks mentioned earlier, and the latter featuring a sweet modal falling melody, overall static in character. (The metronome marking of the manuscript is 'corrected' by Staebler for his recent edition to double its value, but my preference is for the manuscript version and that is upheld on this recording.) The bar as unit of pulse continues in *Variations* of the same year, but now these units are left for the most part empty. Christian Wolff has mentioned how Feldman used to put pages of graph paper on the wall

and work on his compositions like paintings, and the idea of the score as surface upon which the composer inscribes sounds, treating the page as a space canvas analogous to time, is one often referred to in discussions of the graph pieces but is equally true for this *Variations*. Here the empty (silent) space (time) of the page is annotated by sparse grace note figures, like free-floating events captured in a moment. The striking visual appearance of this score is heightened by the vertical repetitions of a single chord on the fourth page, occurring at the end of the fourth bar of each line to create a 'stripe' down the page, not unlike Barnett Newman's stripes with which Feldman was more than familiar. Composed to be performed with a terrifyingly complex, chance-determined dance by Merce Cunningham, one can only imagine that the noise of Cunningham's footwork and other movements would have constituted the bulk of the sounds heard.



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*Extensions 3* is an exercise in repetition, foreshadowing the patterns of the late works, with an emphasis upon the highest registers, thin textures and quiet dynamics, which makes the shock of the near-final moments all the more vivid. The lack of bass keeps the music floating and almost static and indeed Feldman wrote of the 'Extensions' series of pieces 'I had the feeling of a bridge where you don't see the beginning or the end, where what you see seems transfixed in space.'<sup>7</sup>

*Piano Piece 1952* is, if not so focused upon repetition, an exploration of stasis, with all movement confined to notes of regular and constant value (dotted crotchets, Feldman's predilection for rhythmic values of three still very present even if lacking any audible significance). Though one of his most reduced,

it is also arguably one of the most experimental of Feldman's works, as register, touch, pitch, and shape are brought into stark focus. Alistair Noble has provided evidence for this being considered as the second movement of a two-movement work, the first (now destroyed) movement being one of considerably greater activity and rhythmic variety.

#### *The graph pieces*

Whilst the series of pieces in which Feldman first explored graph notation, the *Projections*, are an exercise in restraint – even though there is a seeming *lack* of restraint given the freedoms given to the performers as to choices of pitch – the *Intersections* are quite the opposite. Here, the graphs function as time canvasses into which Feldman throws clouds of sound – some short and sparse,

others of prolonged duration and immense complexity. Nowhere amongst Feldman's music is the connection to Jackson Pollock's work – both content and method – felt more closely, and *Intersection 3* is the most dense and reckless-sounding piece of all Feldman's output. The David Tudor scholar John Holzaepfel identifies a letter from Feldman to Tudor depicting, in relation to *Intersection 3*, what might seem surprising in the context of Feldman's music 'the kind of music I would like to write – a music like violently boiling water in some monstrous kettle... The last *Intersection*, which I wrote for you, is just an unrealized hint of what is to come' (Holzaepfel, 2002, 171). *Intersection 2* is a substantially different work from *Intersection 3* though they share certain techniques: in both a graph of three squares vertically represents divisions of the piano keyboard into high, middle, and low. Each square represents a unit

of pulse – MM158 in the first piece and MM176 in the second – and each is either empty or contains one or two numbers representing the number of notes to be played in that register and in time frame represented by that square (or, where squares are outlined so as to connect with consecutive squares, to begin at some point in the time frame indicated by the connected squares). Dynamics are free as is the continuity within a column of squares and the nature of the combination of tones within a square; for example, the number 7 within a square could be realised as any chord of 7 notes in that register, a cluster spanning a tritone, or a phrase of seven notes (or indeed 7 repeated notes though that might prove difficult in the time allocated), or some other combination.

Both pieces were composed for David Tudor, the heroic champion of indeterminate music throughout

<sup>7</sup> Programme notes for a recital given by David Tudor at the University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois, USA, on 22 March 1953. <http://www.cnvill.net/mftitles.htm>

1		9	1		9		7	9
4		8	1					9
3		1		4			2	
2		7	5			11		1

the 1950s. Though, as John Holzaepfel and others have pointed out, Tudor typically notated realisations of these and played from his transcriptions. In fact, the velocity and density of *Intersection 3* resulted in Tudor investigating and cataloguing numerous methods for playing clusters, which he subsequently applied to other pieces (Holzaepfel, 1994). Such an approach should not be surprising, within neither the

context of Tudor's own practice, nor the compositional aims of the composer: Feldman, writing retrospectively, considered the graph scores not as providing freedoms for the performer but as vehicles for releasing the sound from the dogma of compositional systems. For performers to notate a realisation, then, is entirely befitting the aesthetic project of the graph pieces. My approach, however, both here and in live

performance, is not to fix a realisation but to play from the score: learning the choreography is essential – this remains a fundamentally different exercise from improvisation – and indeed I frequently annotate the score with hand and finger specifics, but this can be achieved whilst remaining open to constant change as to resultant pitches. Feldman wrote of indeterminate strategies as means to 'un-fix' the elements, the sounds – 'not as symbols, or memories which were memories of other music to begin with.' (Friedman, 35). However, my 'memory' – by which I mean my tastes, my experience, my history with the piano and its repertoire – cannot but fail to reveal itself at some level, and leads me to favour certain intervals over others, most likely coinciding with the Second Viennese School influences that informed much of Feldman's notated music of this time. Famously Feldman ultimately

moved on from this method of composition in part because of performers playing in ways he disliked, such as the student performer at the University of York who played a major triad in *Projection 2*, for what reason we don't know, and was criticised for doing so, not because Feldman disliked major triads particularly, but because the composer felt the sonority was not sufficiently *heard* (Villars, 22). Perhaps, then, my preferences for seconds, sevenths and ninths might be no less problematic if projected as aesthetic intent rather than as *felt* in the moment of performance, though it must be said that the tempo of the *Intersections* is so much faster than that of the *Projections* that time is limited for any 'hearing'. Tudor's realisation, too, though fixed and notated as was Tudor's practice, has been suggested to bear the imprint of his own history, being compared to Stefan Wolpe's *Seven Pieces for*

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*three pianos* (1951), which Feldman knew and Tudor performed (Clarkson).

### *Intermissions*

The title for this series of compositions reflects the context of their writing – each was composed in less than two hours, amidst a day of work or other activities, an ‘intermission’ in the day.<sup>8</sup> They are, then, analogous to compositional improvisations, short pieces, terse and direct statements reflecting a particular kind of Webernian intensity of expression. The third and fourth in the series were not published in Feldman’s lifetime, though are now available in Straebel’s collected volume, and are the most eccentric of the set, the third involving a continual staff of silently depressed notes (some of which are unlikely to produce

audible harmonics), and the fourth being more austere in its regularity and dynamics than the others. *Intermission 5* is the most well-known, beginning as it does with a loud cluster event, followed by a couple of after-tremors, within which all subsequent activity is like remnants of sound shimmering in the aftermath.

*Intermission 6* may be performed by one or two pianists and is unique amongst Feldman’s output (save for the unpublished *Figure of Memory*) for directing that each of the 15 events may be played in any order.<sup>9</sup> Three versions are presented on this set, one which plays each event once only, and two which permit repetitions of material. In a performance note separate from the printed score, Feldman writes ‘The pianist, or pianists, begins with any sound

on the page, will hold until barely audible, then proceed to whichever other sound he may choose. Sounds may be repeated. Dynamics throughout are soft as possible.’ An initial sketch reveals each event in a fixed sequence within its own bar, with the instruction ‘Hold each meas until completely inaudible’. Whilst it is tempting to make a ‘play’ of the material in performance, creating phrases and gestures, the emphasis upon the decay of each sound makes this a truly experimental endeavor.

### *Mid-1950s*

The beguiling set of pieces composed between 1954 and 1956, each with the year of its composition as its title, reveal Feldman at his most Webernesque. Here we see Feldman’s love of the sound world explored by the Second Viennese School, whilst eradicating the system

which conjured those sounds. Each piece is in three-time, the metric character still underlying the many disruptions it is subjected to, and there is a direct gestural character present, a sense of line, poise, and dance which binds this group of pieces together. Consequently a tempo which allows for this sense of line to be perceived seems appropriate, whilst also reinforcing the complexity of some of the detail and the changing resonances, achieved through some deft pedal-work and silently depressed notes.

### *Freeing Durations*

In contrast to the piano pieces of the mid-1950s, the next piano work, *Last Pieces*, stipulates no durations at all. It would appear that the fixed metre and rhythms of the earlier pieces were of limited value for Feldman, and his attention turned to music of no duration, or, more specifically, ‘free’ durations. Each of the four pieces is characterised

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Though the score is dated 1953, there is some evidence to suggest, as do Alistair Noble and Ryan Dohoney, that it was, in fact, composed in 1952.

by its general tempo indications – slow or fast (or very slow and very fast) – and its density. For example, the third movement, which is marked very slow as distinct from the mere ‘slow’ of the first movement, is also less thick harmonically. As discussed earlier, the fourth movement features a technical device unique amongst Feldman’s music in which ‘durations are free for each hand’. Quite how this is worked out in practice is unclear from the notation and instructions, but the instruction clearly subverts the spatial layout of the score, which positions right and left hand in vertical alignment throughout. My approach here is to allow for each hand to move through its line independently, using pauses as occasional ‘catch-up’ points, much like a solo version of the recently composed *Piece for 4 Pianos*, which demands all performers to read from the same single-page score independently. Thus sometimes the hands are in

relationship similar to their spatial layout, but other times one hand might be considerably further down the line than the other. Each performance is different, and this recording presents just one spontaneous iteration of many possible arrangements.

*Vertical Thoughts IV* and *Piano Piece (to Philip Guston)* also employ the stemless noteheads of no duration found in *Last Pieces*, but these are now interspersed with pauses, sustains, and a tempo range which suggests irregularity but within fixed parameters. These pieces might also be seen as analogous to the graph pieces from ten years earlier, exploring as they do a range of densities, degrees of activity (and non-activity) and register. They convey a sense of spontaneity and liveliness whilst also demonstrating a nuanced and carefully considered arrangement of activity over time, even though Feldman described

‘the surface’ of his music since 1958 as being ‘quite flat’, perhaps a nod to the lack of rhythmic distinction in these pieces (Friedman, 90).

*Piano Piece 1964* is considerably sparser than either of its two predecessors and reveals a further development in Feldman’s notational experiments. Like the ensemble pieces with which it is contemporary, *Piano Piece 1964* juxtaposes bars with notated durations and metre, bars of fixed metre but only grace notes within, and bars of no duration consisting of open noteheads. Furthermore the tempo range given to the piece as a whole is greater than in the previous two pieces. An early version of the piece, included in the Feldman archives in the Paul Sacher Foundation, reveals that Feldman allocated specific tempi – wildly varying in degree – to each bar, evidently abandoning that approach for a single range stated at the outset, leaving the

performer to make those decisions. For this recording I have reflected something of the tempo shifts of the earlier manuscript, whilst also observing the range of the published score.

#### *The late pieces*

*Piano* marks the return to writing for solo piano after a thirteen-year hiatus. (Alistair Noble suggests the break might be the result of David Tudor ceasing to be active as a pianist from the early 1960s (Nobel, 10 fn30).) It is one of Feldman’s most remarkable works, revealing a deep concern for the instrument’s sonority, register, and texture, now combined with his new-found concern for patterns and form. Whilst this is by no means Feldman’s only piano work which lends its instrument name to the title it is perhaps the one most suited to it – despite its notational impracticalities, as described above, it is, for me, the piece

which reveals Feldman's love of the instrument most completely. Feldman would also seem to have conceived it in relation to the piano's history: writing after Feldman's death, pianist Yvar Mikhashoff describes how he puzzled over the rising gesture (occurring around eight minutes into the present recording) which Feldman responded 'In those five notes is the entire 19th-century piano repertoire, then you wait for the 20th.' (Bewley)

*Triadic Memories* is the longest of all Feldman's piano works. Quite where it sits within Feldman's compositional thinking concerning form and scale is not clear – he talked of pieces up to one hour length as being concerned with form, whilst dealing after 90 minutes with scale.<sup>10</sup> There is a very clear formal divide, however: at the

golden section point – one hour into this performance – there is a marked change to a very different kind of music, with irregular rests and metre, and the introduction of semiquaver movement. At this point the music seems to break down and fragment, after the relative security of the preceding hour of music, which gently toys between a bar unit divided into 4 and then moving toward divisions of 3. The flow of semiquavers gently modulates between speeds, such as 6:5 and 8:7, what Feldman once described as a 'disproportionate symmetry' (Friedman, 135), contributing further to the unease in the music's sense of continuity.

As well as the memories of pianists mentioned earlier, there are other types of memory in play here: musical ideas repeat, are subject to slight variation, and recur

later in the piece. One section is remarkable for presenting a sequence of repetitions of different chords all at a suddenly reduced dynamic of *ppppp*, such that each is barely present. The title might also refer to the recollection of an earlier music: the residue of functional tonality can be detected across the piece, perhaps most especially at the beginning which features a minor third in one hand (G-Bb) and a resolving dominant seventh-tonic relationship in the other (G#/D-A/C#). Feldman spoke of treating these tonal fragments as if they were 'found objects', and much of the piece could be thought of as one thing followed by another, interrupted by another (Villars, 88). Part of the play with scale and momentum is the frequency with which change occurs; sometimes the same kind of pattern is extended over a long time, whilst at other times, particularly in the last quarter of the piece, the music is characterised

by rapid fragmentation. The memory of earlier music, however, is not just one of type: in the sketch materials at the Paul Sacher Foundation – and there is a great deal of sketch material, revealing Feldman's careful attention to material, form and manipulation, throwing the idea of Feldman as an entirely intuitive composer into disarray – some of the gestures have annotations, such as a short grace-note figure which occurs near the end, over which Feldman writes 'Why wasn't Cage's early music influential? A trace 35 years later...'

Another sketch page suggests that at one point Feldman thought of dedicating the piece to Cage on the occasion of his 70th birthday (which would have taken place one year after the first performance), with the word 'apoggiatura' once more asserting the association between Cage and this material (see above for more about the influence of Cage's 1940s music

<sup>10</sup> Morton Feldman, Universal Edition brochure, <https://www.universaledition.com/morton-feldman-220>



upon Feldman). Around sketches of material from the same area (pages 42-43 of the printed score) Feldman also writes 'about chords - all over with resounding harmonics... a [illegible] of 1953. Try something "old" Try something "new"'. Despite the illegibility of some of these annotations there is a clear sense of Feldman recalling an older music. (Also here is a sketch for the last chord of page 42 with a grace note silently depressed note

underneath, doubtless eventually omitted because of the addition of the half-pedal, a new technique Feldman employed for this piece. Perhaps the idea of resonance itself is some kind of reflection of memory.) There is a significantly extended passage of music in the sketches which focuses upon these very chords, ultimately rejected for the final version of the piece. And if there is any doubt that Feldman is deliberately conjuring images

Triadic Memories - Morton Feldman "Triadic Memories[für Klavier"  
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from the past here, in the middle of a related sketch page for the same material, he writes:

'TRIADIC MEMORIES

P.G.

J.C. AUTOBIOGRAPHY

M.F.'

(the initials presumably referring to Philip Guston, John Cage and himself).

Despite its length, *For Bunita Marcus* is a far more restrained and intimate work than *Triadic Memories*. Instead of playing with multiple 'objects', re-ordering them, recalling them, the focus here is upon the sustained probing of single ideas of limited content and a generally thin texture. Phrases (if they can be called that) of varying lengths simply start and stop, only to start up again after a short breath. At the micro-level, slight variations of rhythm



Ibid.

and duration ensure the material never rests, yet at the macro-level the impression is of stasis. Simple transpositions, inversions and subtractions/additions occur without drama, though sometime a single change of a new pitch being added can seem a momentous event. A gradual shift toward prolongation at the end simply increases the stasis but even this does not effectively prepare for the end, which simply stops. It is a remarkable essay in restraint and intimacy stretched over an extended scale.

*Palais de Mari*, commissioned by the dedicatee of the earlier piece, composer Bunita Marcus, is Feldman's last composition for solo piano and is the simplest, most transparent of these late pieces. Like *For Bunita Marcus*, it centres around a limited set of material, a gentle pattern and alternating chords. Yet its understated charm can mask both the compositional

rigour and playfulness of the piece; Tom Hall has described in detail the relationships between the spatial grid of bars typical of Feldman's music, as noted above, and the symmetrical patterns of intervals and inversions that reveal the composer displacing events in careful relationships across the page. This geometric play is perhaps an acknowledgement of the architectural inspiration which gave rise to the title, the ruins of an ancient Mesopotamian palace in modern day Syria, a photo of which Feldman saw at the Louvre in Paris. However, against this formal backdrop Feldman plays with material which is remarkable for its fifth-based consonance, and the feeling of tonal resolution, particularly during the final descending figure, is poignant in the extreme.



Roland Barthes, 'The Grain of the Voice', in *Image-Music-Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977)

John Bewley June in Buffalo 25th Anniversary Exhibit (University of Buffalo, 2000)

Martine Cadieu, 'Morton Feldman - Waiting' [1971] in Chris Villars (ed.), *Morton Feldman Says: Selected Interviews and Lectures 1964-1987* (London: Hyphen Press, 2006), 38-40

Austin Clarkson, 'Stefan Wolpe and Abstract Expressionism', in Steven Johnson (ed.), *The New York Schools of Music and Visual Arts* (London: Routledge, 2002), 75-112

Dirk de Klerk, 'Morton Feldman in Johannesburg, July 1983: Ideas and Opinions', *MUZIKI*, 3/2 (2006)

Ryan Dohoney, 'Élan Vital ... and How to Fake it': Morton Feldman and Merle Marsicano's *Vernacular Metaphysics*, *Contemporary Music Review* 38, 3/4 (2019), 1-18

Morton Feldman, 'Predeterminate/Indeterminate', [1965] in B.H.Friedman (ed.), *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman* (Cambridge: Exact Change, 2000), 33-36

Morton Feldman, 'The Anxiety of Art', [1965] in B.H.Friedman (ed.), *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman* (Cambridge: Exact Change, 2000), 21-32

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Booklet: cover image 'Rough Pasture (Veins)', p.9 'From Bibemus Quarry', p.16 'Evidence (Veins)'  
Disc 1 'Out of Ochre', Disc 2 'Out of Limestone', Disc 3 'Carrière de Bibémus, Aix-en-Provence',  
Disc 4 'Hard-won from Graphite', Disc 5 'Mountain above Quarry'

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